NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY RECOMMENDATONS

National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness

Communauté nationale d'apprentissage sur l'itinerance des jeunes

NATIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness is a pan-Canadian community of practice consisting of leading youth serving organizations and experts from across the country who:

- work collaboratively on key issues;
- share emerging and promising practices;
- develop strategies and tools to strengthen our sector; and
- work towards a reduction in the length of time that youth experience homelessness, due to improved practices and policies.

The Learning Community has 29 members in 23 Canadian communities (ranging from Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal to Yellowknife, Saint John and Guelph). Please see Appendix A for our Member List.

HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

> **"People make assumptions about youth experiencing homelessness and face stigma, such as being "bad", "lazy" "not getting a job" (Youth focus group participant).**

Often when we talk about youth experiencing homelessness, we talk about a loss of potential or supporting youth to reach their full potential. Instead we should be talking about how homelessness, and the risk of becoming homeless, violates the human rights of young Canadians.

> **"The UN has repeatedly told Canada that it needs a housing strategy as part of its pointed warnings that the country's homeless population, which now stands at about 235,000, is a human rights issue that needs to be addressed" (Press, 2016).**

By using a human rights framework, homelessness is no longer a personal failing, instead it a failure of the state to provide for citizens. It is imperative that the federal government design the National Housing Strategy within a human rights framework in order to properly address the gravity and urgency of the issue of homelessness in general, and youth homelessness in particular. A human rights framework recognizes that all young people have a fundamental, legal right to be free from homelessness and to have access to adequate housing. No young person should be without a safe and decent place to live.

LANGUAGE

We have adopted the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness: "Youth homelessness refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence" (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016: 1)

When we are talking about youth directly we use the term youth with lived experience. This is because homelessness is not an identity. Rather, homelessness is a condition that happens to people. We use youth homelessness to refer to the social issue.

WHY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS IMPORTANT

"Youth don't have anyone in their support circles who can help them, they have lost themselves" (Youth focus group participant).

We know from various studies and reports that young Canadians are living with their parents for longer period of times in response to high rates of youth unemployment and expensive rental costs.[1]

What happens to young people for whom living in the family home is not an option? What are the options for these people when they are facing eviction? It is critical that Canada's National Housing Strategy include a focus on preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness.

We have designed six recommendations that need to be included in the National Housing Strategy to ensure that the strategy prevents, reduces and ends youth homelessness (and by extension prevents adult homelessness). "The experiences of homeless youth are distinct. Unlike homeless adults, youth who leave home are leaving relationships based on social dependence – a parent or guardian – and suddenly must face the challenges of an adult before they have gained the skills or experience of adults" (Canada Without Poverty and A Way Home Canada, 2016: 4). There are a number of reasons why youth experience homelessness in Canada beyond the traditional narrative of family conflict. There are a number of systems that discharge youth into homelessness (e.g. youth in care and justice). High youth

---

[1] The 2011 Census of Population showed that 42.3% of the 4,318,400 young adults aged 20 to 29 lived in the parental home, either because they never left it or because they returned home after living elsewhere. This proportion changed little from 2006 (42.5%). However, it was higher than in preceding decades: 32.1% in 1991 and 26.9% in 1981 (Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29, http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_3-eng.cfm)

unemployment rates and a lack of affordable housing compound existing stressors.

Canada requires a strategy that will support youth who are at-risk of experiencing homelessness from becoming homeless and guarantees that if a young person becomes homeless the experience is temporary and brief.

YOUTH VOICE -- NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

> "We believe that without including individuals with lived experience in the decision making process, in research, and in all other endeavours, it creates an unbalanced approach to ending homelessness in Canada" (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016: 1).

It is a core belief of the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness that we will not end youth homelessness in Canada without youth participating in discussion and decision making processes. Youth with lived experiences of homelessness are the true content experts. For this report, we conducted two youth focus groups and designed an online survey to collect the insights of youth with lived experiences of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Youth homelessness is a different population from the adult homelessness population and requires solutions that address their unique needs/issues

> "Youth who are homeless are more likely to not have the schooling they need completed. Youth on the street are also much more likely to be taken advantage of by strangers, especially for prostitution, due to lack of resources and experience with people that adults have" (Youth focus group participant).

The National Housing Strategy must have provisions that are clearly and intentionally designed for youth. Youth homelessness cannot be viewed and treated as homelessness junior. Youth experiencing homelessness require additional supports and different responses to those required by adults. "One of the negative consequences of housing instability and homelessness for youth is that they are thrust into adult roles (getting a job, finding housing, financial management, sexual relations) at an accelerated rate, without access to many of the institutions and activities that are designed to help them navigate the transition to adulthood (school, employment, experiential learning, adult mentoring)" (Redman and Gaetz, 2016: 6). Factors that lead to youth experiencing homelessness are often different from those that lead to adult homelessness. Family conflict is the main reason why young people leave their family home early, or they are leaving the care of child welfare services (Gaetz, 2014: 7). It is unrealistic to apply programs, interventions and policies that are designed for adults onto youth experiencing homelessness.

> "Youth need support with appointments, health, jobs, after school programs. Grants and preparation for post-secondary school would help" (Youth focus group participant).

A youth strategy needs to be multifaceted, diverse and unique to the many issues that youth experience. This ranges from preventive programming that supports

youth within their familial contexts as families work through crisis that may lead to a young person becoming homeless through to housing options such as short and long term transitional supportive housing leading to greater autonomy. Through a youth-centric lens, the ability to offer flexible, meaningful and timely resources that match a young person's needs are instrumental in ending a vicious cycle of homelessness.

There also needs to be a range of options available to youth to fit their needs, preferences and local context. Primary among these are prevention programs that will keep young Canadians out of shelters and housing supports that help youth end their experience of homelessness as quickly as possible (and maintain supports to keep them from becoming homeless again).

The National Housing Strategy and federal funding for communities must, therefore, remain flexible enough to accommodate various program models at the local level that meet youths' developmental, social, and mental needs.

> **"While I do believe that youth need certain supports to get out of homelessness, underestimating the transition period between the ages of 24 and 25, as well as for the early ages when in the 'Adult Homelessness' bracket, there needs to be some extra supports for those who are working towards getting out of it as well" (Online survey response).**

2. Investment in youth homelessness programs with a focus on prevention and housing supports

Our current response to youth homelessness is woefully insufficient. As a society we use emergency shelters as a long-term solution to youth homelessness, instead of their intended purpose of being a short stay for young people until they can reconnect with family (if that is possible) or find appropriate housing for their needs.

"Youth who are homeless are more likely to not have the schooling they need completed. Youth on the street are also much more likely to be taken advantage of by strangers, especially for prostitution, due to lack of resources and experience with people that adults have" (Online survey response).

A majority of youth who completed our online survey believe that prevention programs (like school-based programs and family reconnection) would help prevent youth from experiencing homelessness. 94% of youth feel that having access to housing supports (like rent banks and landlord tenant support) would help them to successfully maintain independent housing.

"If we just provide young people with emergency supports – that is, if we expect them to pull themselves out of homelessness by their bootstraps – then we risk contributing to their entrenchment in homelessness, meaning long-term declines in health and well-being and long-term exclusion from education and employment" (Redman and Gaetz, 2016: 6) Further to this, we know through existing research that many adults who are experiencing homelessness had their first experience of homelessness as a youth. By ending youth homelessness in Canada, we are preventing adult homelessness.

We need to shift from our attempts to address/manage youth homelessness towards the goal of preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness. This requires interventions that prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place, and to help youth maintain their independent housing once they have exited homelessness.

We know all too well that the longer a young person experiences homelessness, the harder it is for them to exit homelessness. Many adults who are homeless indicate that their first experience of homelessness was in their youth. We know from extensive research that the further young people travel away from their natural supports (ex. family, friends, teachers, and community) the higher their risk of experiencing violence and exploitation. It is in young people's best interest to keep them in their home communities and from migrating to other/larger centres.

Prevention Programs

To keep youth in their communities, we need to create programs that are responsive to the needs of youth and the local context. This is especially true in rural and remote communities. This is one of the many reasons why we need a prevention framework that includes the range of: family first philosophy, family reconnection, host homes, landlord-tenant agreements, etc.

We know that prevention works: washing our hands regularly can prevent the spread of cold and flu viruses; proper maintenance of a car can prevent a huge mechanic bill. Governments and funders need to support the youth homelessness sector shift to a prevention framework. A number of organizations have already adopted a prevention framework. The federal government needs to support the design, implementation and evaluation of homelessness prevention programs for youth.

> **"Youth have seen firsthand the success of prevention supports in school and family first programs (family reconnection) – some youth shared that no one knew they were homeless while in school" (Youth focus group response).**
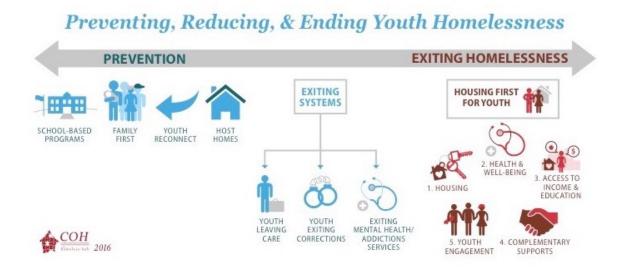
As part of a multi-tiered response, prevention work is perhaps the most critical, effective and financially fiscal response that we can offer. As a country we have focused on crisis responses (e.g. emergency shelters), which are expensive to operate and have not allocated the necessary resources to design, implement and evaluate prevention program and services. Prevention-based practices have greater impact and are frequently a more cost effective approach. Early intervention within the school systems, and family support when young people are living at home can be very effective at preventing a young person entering this system.

There are three tiers of prevention. Primary prevention addresses structural and systems factors that more broadly contribute to housing precarity and the risk of homelessness. This includes preventing youth exiting care from becoming homeless. The same with youth exiting justice and hospitals and mental health providers need to cease discharging youth into homelessness. Primary prevention

also includes: livable wages (anti-poverty work in general), affordable housing, housing benefit for low income Canadians (please recommendation 4 for more on a national housing benefit).

Secondary prevention involves strategies and interventions directed at individuals and families either at imminent risk of homelessness or who have recently experienced homelessness, such as early intervention and evictions prevention. This includes shelter diversion work like family reconnection/reunification, host homes, rental supplements, and housing benefit for low income Canadians.

Finally, tertiary prevention supporting individuals and families who are chronically homeless to access housing and supports, thereby reducing the risk that they will become homeless again. This includes Housing First, Rapid Re-Housing and transitional housing.

The above diagram illustrates the key components of a youth homelessness prevention framework.

> "Youth have seen firsthand the success of prevention supports in school and family first programs (family reconnection) – some youth shared that no one knew they were homeless while in school and questioned how to make

sure that prevention programs would work well for all youth" (Youth focus group facilitator).

There is currently a pilot project in Canada testing school-based interventions based on the established programs in Australia. In Canada there are a number of organizations operating family reconnection programs. More funding is required to evaluate these programs to identify promising practices and also support early intervention work to support the family while it is in crisis, before the youth leaves the family home.

Housing Supports
There also needs to be an investment in housing supports and promotion of promising practices such as: landlord-tenant agreements, rent banks, housing benefits. Eviction prevention programs enable youth to remain housed and reduces the need for emergency shelter usage.

The federal government through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy has adopted Housing First framework. Several Learning Community members operate Housing First programs, as "Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a key intervention for young people who have already experienced homelessness. It means moving them out of homelessness as quickly as possible with no preconditions, and providing them with a range of supports that will help them maintain housing, learn life skills, have positive relationships with peers and adults, re-engage with school, employment training and employment. HF4Y is a form of youth homelessness prevention because it is designed to reduce the risk that young people will ever experience homelessness again" (Redman and Gaetz, 2016: 7)

With the move towards Housing First, there is a need for increased supports for youth. These supports include but are not limited to: health and well-being (including mental health programs with timely access and appropriate referrals), access to income and education, etc. We know that more than half of young Canadians who are homeless are also coping with mental health issues (National Learning Community on Youth Homeless, 2014). The vast majority of these young people lack access to mental health programs. Mental Health providers need to become partners in work to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness and there are systemic changes required. The same can be said for youth in care and

corrections. All three of these systems are failing young Canadians and exiting them into homelessness. This is one of the many reasons we are recommending a Federal/Provincial/Territorial Youth Homelessness Planning Table (see recommendation 5) that focus on supporting community planning processes to end youth homelessness. This table needs to not only be intergovernmental but also interdepartmental.

Evaluation and Innovation
Funding for programs and services needs to include support for evaluation and knowledge mobilization. "Many communities and service providers in the nonprofit sector lack effective tools, resources and capacity to engage in rigorous program evaluation or to disseminate knowledge learned in order to assist service providers and program planners elsewhere" (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013: 14). As youth-serving organizations working with homeless youth, we are constantly examining our own practices and those of others locally, nationally and internationally. Funding for evaluative tools that demonstrate impact and promising practices are imperative in our ability to reduce and end youth homelessness.

We strongly encourage the federal government to support youth-serving organizations to explore and test new programs that will prevent youth from entering the shelter system (such as family reconnection and host home programs) and programs that will get young people out of the shelter system faster (such as housing first, rent supplement program etc.). Calls for funding should include an evaluation process and budget. We require an evidence-based approach to program design, implementation and evaluation that is reflective of different community contexts.

In addition, consideration should be given to development of youth specific non-profit housing corporations. As non-profit housing projects are designed by local communities to meet their unique needs, this concept fits within our philosophy of respecting the local context. An increase in the number of Rent-Geared-to-Income units would benefit youth who are often precariously employed and/or trying to balance independent living with attending school. For this concept to work, youth-serving organizations (especially those with a housing and homelessness focus) need to be at the stakeholder table to design and implement such projects.

Further, youth need to be included in these conversations in more than a token measure. Youth need to be actively engaged and given voting rights at the table.

3. A new federal, provincial and territorial affordable housing framework agreement that includes direct investments in affordable housing programs and the creation of an affordable housing tax credit

> **"More affordable housing in rural areas, specifically for youth, is needed" (Online survey response).**

One of the main reasons youth are unable to sustain their housing is the lack of affordable housing available[2]. This is especially true for young people who are precariously employed. In order to prevent youth from becoming homeless again, there needs to be a series of supports to help them maintain their housing. We need an increase in the number of affordable housing units.

It is important that a new federal, provincial and territorial affordable housing framework agreement include specific provisions to ensure units are reserved for youth. It is estimated that approximately 20% of people experiencing homelessness in Canada are youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Ideally 20% of new affordable housing units need to be reserved for youth.

As the quote at the start of this recommendation points out more needs to be done in rural and remote areas to support youth who are at risk of experiencing homeless or are experiencing homelessness to keep in them in their home communities near to their natural supports. When youth migrate to larger communities, they are at higher risk of violence and exploitation. Additional

---

[2] "In order to achieve meaningful reductions in homelessness and get value for money with a significant new federal investment in housing, the Government of Canada should set clear priorities and expectations for their investment. It is critical that the provinces and territories are invested in these new housing priorities as they have principal jurisdiction over many of the critical systems of care that impact homelessness and, in the end, will be the net financial beneficiaries of reduced homelessness. Finally, any new federal investment in housing has to reflect the reality that homelessness and homeless systems are ultimately local or regional in nature and as a result investment planning and allocation must also be local or regional" (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014: 51).

affordable housing units in rural and remote communities will help prevent youth from experiencing homelessness.

There is a risk that some landlords may be reluctant or even refuse to rent to young people, regardless that this is a human rights violation. In many Canadian communities, youth-serving organizations are working directly with landlords to develop landlord-tenant agreements. These can range from rent subsidies, to the organization being responsible for the rental unit and make any necessary repairs. Landlord-tenant agreements can provide landlords with the peace of mind that the youth has the supports in place to maintain the condition of and payment for their housing.

Using the landlord-tenant agreement model as a template, developers would also be able to establish relationships with youth-serving organizations in their community to fill vacant affordable housing units. Agreements between developers and youth-serving organizations will not only mitigate the perceived risk of taking on youth as tenants, but will also provide an opportunity to dispel misconceptions of youth, making developers more comfortable renting to youth in the future. If successful, this approach will increase the number of youth accepted into affordable rental units, and will increase awareness among developers of the reliability of such agreements.

4. A portable housing benefit to assist those who face severe affordability problems in their current accommodation

Portable housing benefits[3] would be a great tool for youth to be able to maintain housing. It would be especially useful for youth in larger communities with high rent and low vacancy rates. In communities with few affordable housing options, a

---

[3] "The housing benefit we are proposing is a monthly cash payment that would go directly to renter households with low-incomes and housing costs that are burdensome. The benefit could be delivered through the income tax system and deposited directly into the recipient's bank account, similar to 'child tax' benefits. Based on an earlier study by Pomeroy et al. (2008) in Ontario, Londerville and Steele (2014) suggest that the housing benefit would take into account income and the cost of the housing (e.g. maximum income for a family of two adults and two children would be under $36,000 while a single would need to make less than $22,000). Recipients would be expected to make a reasonable contribution towards the cost of their housing – for example 30% of their income – and the housing benefit would cover 75% of the difference between the actual housing costs and the contribution" (Gaetz, et. al., 2014: 58).

housing benefit will enable youth to find adequate housing, while also reducing the need for rent subsidy programs.

Youth between 16-18 would be eligible for a housing benefit if they are living with their parents/guardians that would be paid to the parent/guardian as part of the parent's benefit payment, as the goal is to support individuals and families to prevent evictions. For youth who no longer reside in the family home, there would need to a mechanism to avoid double payments. There are two recommended options to mitigate this risk and confirm the need for the benefit:

- *Social Assistance documentation process*. In many communities youth serving organizations connect youth to social assistance programs to ensure that they have income while living in the shelter. Social Assistance workers would ensure that the young person no longer lives in the family home. The social assistance worker would then submit a letter confirming that the young person no longer lives in with their parents, providing sufficient proof residency to approve the youth's receipt of the portable housing benefit.

- *Youth leaving Children's Aid Society after 16*. Youth in care can decide to leave family protective services at 16, at which point they would submit a letter from their former youth in care worker that states the young person is no longer a ward of the state and is living independently. This would provide sufficient proof of residency to approve the youth's receipt of the portable housing benefit.

Both of these processes leverage existing systems and are cost-neutral options to prove that a young person is no longer living with their family. A housing benefit program would not replace existing rental supports.

Further, it is important that receiving a portable housing benefit does not count as additional income. This would have a negative effect on people receiving social assistance or disability. A portable housing benefit program should be indexed to regions to compensate for higher rents in larger cities (such as Toronto and Vancouver). A portable housing benefit would enable people to live in neighbourhoods they want to live in. This is consistent with the stated importance of young people having the ability to make decisions that work best for them. A portable program enables communities to house homelessness or precariously

housed individuals much quicker than having the benefit tied to the landlord and people waiting for years on waiting lists.

A national, portable housing benefit program would reduce the need for rent banks and similar rental support programs. This would enable local communities to reallocate those funds into different housing support and homelessness prevention programs. Further to this an increase in the number of affordable rental units (see our third recommendation) would also improve rental opportunities for young people.

Given that most young people have a sporadic attachment to employment or other financial means, the necessity for a housing benefit or a "rental supplement" is crucial. Housing benefits will work for people who are already renters. It does not support people trying to leave the shelter system.

Youth entering the housing market face multiple barriers one of the most common and insurmountable is affordability. An example of local response to affordability has been the development of rent supplement programs and last month's rent programs. Many communities have allocated funding to support young people moving out of the shelter system and into rental housing to cover the cost of the move. This includes paying the the last month's rent and the installation/setup of required utilities.

Many youth serving organizations have established a Housing Support Worker initiative. This program supports youth in their transition from emergency shelter to independence. For a great majority of youth exiting homelessness, the rental supplement is one of the most important components in their ability to find safe, appropriate housing. This is a critical aspect of housing and the Housing First model.

In our youth consultations, youth were clear that while a portable housing benefit would help youth maintain their housing, it would not be sufficient to help them afford an apartment in the first place. For this reason, flexible rent supplements will still be required to help youth exit homelessness.

5. Federal/Provincial/Territorial Youth Homelessness Planning Table that focuses on supporting community planning processes to end youth homelessness

Almost all of the youth surveyed think the federal government and provincial/territorial governments need to do more on the issue of youth homelessness and that there needs to intergovernmental discussions on ending youth homelessness.

> **"The Government in my opinion could take away most of the youth homelessness if they worked on it together!" (Online survey respondent).**

Youth homelessness cannot be ended by meeting housing needs alone. There are a number of systemic pipelines that exit youth into homelessness. These include but are not limited to child protective services, justice and mental health. In addition, to be an intergovernmental table, there also needs to be representatives of the different government departments that are connected to youth homelessness.

The community planning process is great way to bring local stakeholders together to discuss the ways youth are becoming homeless, map local systems and design new systems and projects/programs that will support the local context and needs of young people to prevent youth homelessness when possible and when it cannot be prevented to ensure that experiences of homelessness are temporary and brief.

Government policy needs to include an objective of achieving a Functional Zero[4] on youth homelessness. In order to end youth homelessness, we need to set

---

[4] "Functional Zero is achieved when there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs it. In this approach, emergency shelters are meant to be temporary and the goal is permanent housing. While the focus on supports is to prevent homelessness to begin with, this may not always be possible and in such cases, a system that is responsive and acts quickly is essential. A key aim of homeless-serving systems is to provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured. Of course, determining the [breadth] and depth of need in a community is often problematic. Certain [subpopulations] may not proactively seek assistance (i.e. youth, women, people who use illicit drugs), and we currently lack a solid methodology to enumerate the at-risk and hidden homeless population" (Turner, 2016: 5).

goals and targets. Further to the need to set goals and targets, Canada needs to improve the data being collected. We need make it easier for youth-serving organizations to collect the data needed to evaluate our work to prevent and end youth homelessness. We also need systems for compiling the needed data by community, region, province and nationally.

Improved data can support program and organizational funding to target interventions that are successfully preventing and ending youth homelessness. "Federal leadership, direction and investment on the issue of youth homelessness can yield significant policy and practice changes provincially and territorially. This will create the context for greater alignment of policy and funding, sharing of practices and creating a pan-Canadian strategy. This could be a cost neutral partnership that will continue to inform the Federal agenda and open doors for more provincial, territorial and community action in the area of youth homelessness. To achieve maximum impact, Provincial and Territorial governments should be expected to match the Federal investment in order to access funding" (Gaetz, Redman, 2016: 9).

In the past five years, there has been a movement in many Canadian communities to develop youth-specific plans to end youth homelessness. We know from our work that interventions showing success in larger communities do not always translate to smaller or rural communities. Work to end youth homelessness requires the ability to adapt practice and policy to fit the local context.

An intergovernmental Youth Homelessness Planning Table should be established and must include a focus on the community planning process to ensure local work benefits from the knowledge and experiences of other communities. Too many communities are not aware of the positive work being done elsewhere. This could be a symptom of Canada's large geography, but it is more likely the result of people working hard without adequate resources to look up and see what other youth homelessness organizations are doing.

A Youth Homelessness Planning Table needs include resources for knowledge mobilization of promising practices and support the dissemination of program evaluations to leverage the work being done in Canada and internationally where appropriate. Resources needed include: funding, translation (from English to

French and vice versa), communications support to share learnings across communities and regions and technical supports to communities.

> "… there should be youth involved to provide their input, with a range of youth participating" (Youth focus group participant).

> "For too long, people with lived experience have been confined to a limited role—as service recipients, objects of policy-making, or research subjects—in efforts to end homelessness. But policy, research and service organizations require the insight and leadership of people with lived experience at all levels in order to achieve the kind of transformative change that is needed" (Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016: 2).

Youth need to be included at the table. The federal government can take the lead on this. Support is needed to create a national youth table that is comprised of young people with lived experiences of homelessness. It is important that youth involved at planning tables be financially compensated for their expertise. There also needs to be support and training for youth to ensure they are equal partners at the table.

6. Housing and Support for Indigenous Youth

> "Due to the statistics showing that Indigenous peoples are the group most likely to suffer from poverty in our country, programs that help out those communities future's will always be important. If indigenous youth are able to get affordable housing, get assistance finding employment, and resources to address mental health (as the suicide rate for indigenous people is astronomical), then they will likely be able to pull themselves out of poverty" (Online survey response).

"It should be noted that Indigenous youth, who are overrepresented in the youth homelessness population, face additional challenges because of the legacy of colonialism and racism in Canada. While a consideration of the needs of Indigenous youth should run through all planning and program activities, it is also important to support the development of Indigenous-led interventions. A funding stream that provides support for Indigenous-focused and -led programs to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness should be made available, and all communities engaging in broader strategies should be expected to address the needs of this population in their planning" (Gaetz and Redman, 2016: 8).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action contains a number of recommendations that if adopted will support the work to prevent and end Indigenous youth homelessness. We strongly encourage the federal government to endorse and adopt the recommendations and use the recommendations to guide its work to end youth homelessness in Canada.

What this means for Indigenous youth experiencing homeless is:

- A range of programs including education-based interventions, employment and training programs, housing programs and supports that are culturally inclusive and appropriate for Indigenous youth.

- As we have stated earlier it is important that young people have the supports they require in their home communities. This is also true with Indigenous youth. Funding is needed to improve supports on- and off- reserve.

Housing and support for Indigenous youth needs to include funding for prevention programs. One program that would benefit communities is the award winning Niwasa Aboriginal Education Program in Hamilton Ontario. This is a school-based education program that provides culture-based educational services to Aboriginal children, youth and families. Services ranges from early years programs through to supports for youth in secondary schools. In the past 12 years, the program has seen a growth in the number of Aboriginal students graduating from high school each year, from 4 in the year before the program was launched to 38 graduates in 2014. This program can easily be replicated by other school boards.

This work has the potential to use as a template for improved housing and supports for other overrepresented youth groups, such as racialized youth, newcomer youth and LGBTQ2S youth. Each of these groups also require specialized supports. This strategy is similar to the work in the United States to address the overrepresentation of veterans' homelessness and will be applied the learnings from this work to focus on other specific populations, such as youth.

> **"We should be more inclusive in mainstream services" (Youth focus group participant).**

As the youth above wisely points out, in addition to specialized programs for indigenous youth, we need to make sure mainstream services are welcoming and inclusive spaces for indigenous youth. This involves cultural diversity and safety training for staff and volunteers. Promoting this type of work should be an activity of federal government departments and agencies.

CONCLUSION

Canada needs to create communities that are welcoming and inclusive for the most marginalized of its citizens. By doing this, our communities will be welcoming and inclusive for all of us. In the context of housing the most marginalized are people experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. The federal government has the opportunity to end youth homelessness in Canada by adopting and enforcing a National Housing Strategy that includes a focus on preventing and ending youth homelessness. We look forward to working with the federal government to accomplish this goal.

SOURCES

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2016). Canadian Definition Of Youth Homelessness. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Canada Without Poverty and A Way Home Canada (2016). Youth Rights! Right Now! Ending Youth Homelessness: a Human Rights Guide. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2013): What Works and For Whom? A Hierarchy of Evidence for Promises Practices Research. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Gaetz, S. (2014). Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Gaetz, Stephen, Tanya Gulliver, & Tim Richter (2014): The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Gaetz, Stephen & Redman, Melanie (2016). Federal Investment in Youth Homelessness: Comparing Canada and the United States and a proposal for reinvestment. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Policy Brief. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Lived Experience Advisory Council. (2016). Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press. www.homelesshub.ca/NothingAboutUsWithoutUs

Press, Jordan (July 12, 2016). "UN: Canada's national housing strategy needs human rights pillar". The Canadian Press (http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/un-canadas-national-housing-strategy-needs-human-rights-pillar/?platform=hootsuite)

Redman, Melanie & Gaetz, Stephen (2016). "Making the Shift: Reimagining the response to youth homelessness through social innovation"

Turner, Alina (2016). DISCERNING 'FUNCTIONAL ZERO': Considerations for Defining & Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Truth and ReconciliationCommission of Canada (2015). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

APPENDIX A -- MEMBER LIST

Kim Wirth
Director of Youth Housing & Shelters
Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary
Calgary, AB

Gail Cullen
Executive Director
Brandon Friendship Centre
Brandon, MB

TBD
Manager
Broadway Youth Resource Centre
Vancouver, BC

Mike Gawliuk
Director of Service Delivery and Program
Innovation
Canadian Mental Health Association --
Kelowna and District
Kelowna, BC

Philippe Guay
Coordinator
Centre Jacques Cartier
Quebec City, PQ

Sheldon Pollett
Executive Director
Choices for Youth
St. John's, NL

Carol Howes
Program Director
Covenant House Toronto
Toronto, ON

Marilyn Dyck
Executive Director
The Doorway
Calgary, AB

Clovis Grant
General Manager
Eva's Initiatives
Toronto, ON

Val Janz
Director of Child and Family Services
Interior Community Services
Kamloops, BC

Tara Everitt
Youth Services-Supervisor
Kingston HomeBase
Kingston, ON

Cecile Arbaud
Executive Director
Le Bon Dieu dans la rue
Montreal, PQ

Amy Smith
(NYA:WEH) Program Coordinator
Niwasa Aboriginal Education Program
Hamilton, ON

Michael Lethby
Executive Director
Niagara RAFT
St. Catharines, ON

Rob Morris
Director, Residential Programs
Phoenix
Halifax, NS

Kelly Holmes
Executive Director
Resource Assistance for Youth
Winnipeg, MB

Greg Bishop
Community Entity Coordinator
Saint John Human Development Council
Saint John, NB

Darrell Lechman
Founder/Director
SCYAP Inc.
Saskatoon, SK

Iris Hamlyn
Executive Director
SideDoor
Yellowknife, NW

Erika Morton
Social Planner (Social Planning and Research
Council of Hamilton)
Street Youth Planning Collaborative
Hamilton, ON

Mark Muldoon
Executive Director
Threshold Housing Society
Victoria, BC

Debbie Bentley-Lauzon
Executive Director
Wyndham House
Guelph, ON

Louise Smith
General Manager, Youth Outreach and
Intervention
YMCA of Greater Toronto
Toronto, ON

Julie Gallant Daigle
Executive Director
Youth In Transition
Fredericton, NB

Larissa Silver
Director of Community Services
Youth Services Bureau
Ottawa, ON

David French
Manager, Homeless Supports Initiatives
(Alberta Government)
Associate Member
Edmonton, AB

Stephen Gaetz
Director of the Canadian Observatory on
Homelessness
Associate Member
Toronto, ON

Sean Kidd
Head of Psychological Services (Centre for
Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
Schizophrenia Division)
Associate Member
Toronto, ON

Robert Wilmot
Former Sector E.D. and Consultant
Associate Member
Vancouver, BC