

How does the COH Definition of Youth Homelessness relate to the existing Canadian Definition of Homelessness?

The [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#) was established in 2012 to provide all levels of government, researchers and community groups with a framework for understanding and describing homelessness, and a means of identifying goals, strategies and interventions, as well as measuring outcomes and progress.

A case was made that addressing any complex problem cannot be done without first having a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of the problem. After all, you cannot measure the scope of the problem without first knowing who is and is not affected. This notion is precisely the challenge that faces all strategic initiatives aimed at addressing homelessness, and our lack of clarity about what counts and what does not gets in the way of creating comprehensive strategies to address homelessness, evaluate outcomes and progress, and share effective practices. The following key reasons for adopting a common definition included:

- Sharing a common language about homelessness
- Enumerating the problem
- Evaluating outcomes and progress
- Coordinating responses to homelessness
- Developing stronger policy responses

The Canadian Definition of Homelessness also provided a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion that describes the range of accommodations that people without appropriate, stable, and permanent housing may experience. Those without acceptable housing experience a range of different 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.

In developing the common definition, it was recognized that the population of people who experience homelessness is quite diverse, and while the typology of homelessness and housing exclusion will apply broadly, the causes and experiences of homelessness may impact different populations in unique ways. The need for expanded definitions that address the specific experiences and circumstances of different populations was identified in the field. The outcome has been the development of two new definitions: youth homelessness (2016) and Indigenous homelessness (forthcoming). These definitions are not separate and discrete, but build upon and articulate with the Canadian Definition of Homelessness.

Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness (2016)

Age matters when considering homelessness. While there are some commonalities that frame the experience of homelessness for young people and adults – lack of affordable housing, systems failures in health care and corrections, for instance – there are important factors unique to the experiences and circumstances of youth that justify a youth-specific definition of homelessness. For instance, unlike the majority of homeless adults, young people leave homes defined by relationships (both social and economic) in which they are typically dependent upon adult caregivers. Young people who are in the process of transitioning toward adulthood, may have yet to acquire the personal, social and life skills that make independent living possible or appropriate. Many young people are in the throes of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Finally, the fact that the age at which one is legally considered a child or adult is inconsistent across jurisdictions and policy areas can result in barriers to accessing services and supports, and can create problems in terms of continuity of care. For these reasons and others, youth-based strategies and interventions that address the needs of young people between the ages of 13-24 must be distinct from those developed for adults who experience homelessness.

To read the full COH definition of youth homelessness, visit: www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessdefinition

