

A Way Home Canada & Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

POLICY BRIEF

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS:

Prioritizing Canada's Most Vulnerable Youth



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Observatory on
Homelessness

homelesshub.ca

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The authors would like to acknowledge and honour young people experiencing homelessness or those at risk of homelessness. Your resiliency, strength and passion remind us every day of what's important and why we must continue to change the status quo. No one should experience homelessness. Every youth matters. You matter!

Additionally, we would like to acknowledge our community and government stakeholders that have helped shape this brief and inform our thinking towards a more focused federal response to youth homelessness. We know that the youth serving sector and communities cannot end youth homelessness alone. To reach our common goal, we will require ongoing collaboration and continued investments in our youth to help them achieve their greatest potential as they transition into adulthood.

A very special acknowledgement goes out to Katherine McParland of A Way Home Kamloops. Your advocacy, sharp mind and personal experiences are woven throughout this brief.

Design by Dylan Ostetto, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Introduction

In a caring and affluent society like Canada, it is unacceptable that any young person would become entrenched in homelessness as a result of family breakdown and systems failures. Despite little evidence that we are reducing youth homelessness, we continue to rely on crisis responses such as emergency shelters and day programs. Even worse, it is objectionable to simply rely on a crisis response to address the issue, exposing young people to harm and expecting them to “bootstrap” themselves out of homelessness. Numerous studies have demonstrated the harmful consequences of allowing young people to remain in an extended state of homelessness, and yet few communities in Canada have youth-specific systems or strategies to help them transition quickly into housing. In this regard, we are not making sufficient progress and too many young people remain stuck in homelessness.

The following brief articulates the vision of a distinct, youth-focused funding stream through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). It focuses on four strategies:

- A) Community Planning and Systems Coordination**
- B) Program Interventions**
- C) Governance and Structure**
- D) Data Collection and Research**

It also introduces youth-centred outcomes that can be supported and leveraged across Federal departments:

- *Increased housing stability for youth;*
- *Prevention of youth homelessness;*
- *Healthy transitions to adulthood;*
- *Enhanced educational participation and achievement;*
- *Stronger employment and labour market participation outcomes; and*
- *Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.*

Numerous studies have demonstrated the harmful consequences of allowing young people to remain in an extended state of homelessness, and yet few communities in Canada have youth-specific systems or strategies to help them transition quickly into housing.

The renewal of the national strategy on homelessness presents a real opportunity to transform how we address youth homelessness in Canada, by moving from managing the crisis and putting young people at great risk, to an approach that focuses on the health and well-being of young people and assisting them to transition to adulthood in a safe and planned manner. The Government of Canada can show great leadership in this regard through making prevention and ending of youth homelessness a priority within the renewed national strategy. This means retaining current investments in Housing First and other community supports but also a dedicated investment in, and prioritization, of youth homelessness.

Why should addressing youth homelessness be a national priority?

There is a growing body of research that attests to the need to focus on the prevention of youth homelessness as well as early intervention.

EARLY AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS.

The *Without a Home* study (Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd & Schwan, 2016) is the largest research project on youth homelessness ever conducted in Canada, which showed meaningful results. For instance, it was found that a large percentage of young people who are homeless, a total of 40%, had their first experience of homelessness before they were 16 years of age. These young people had much worse childhood experiences (ex. exposure to physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as bullying), greater housing instability (including multiple episodes of homelessness), and more acute mental health challenges.

A HIGH PERCENTAGE WERE INVOLVED WITH CHILD PROTECTION.

While less than 0.5% of Canadians were involved with child protection as children or youth, 58% of youth experiencing homelessness have been involved in the past or are currently involved with child protection. 47% were apprehended and had a history of placements in foster care or group homes. For many young people, homelessness is an outcome of poor and unsupported transitions from care. This is a problem we can address if we focus on identifying young people leaving care who are at greatest risk of homelessness, and provide them with the supports they need.

BECOMING HOMELESS INCREASES THE RISK OF DECLINING MENTAL HEALTH, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION.

In terms of mental health, the *Without a Home* study found that 85.4% of the youth sample fell in the “high” symptom/distress category, which meant that they would require something between inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care levels if they were housed. Being homeless also exposes young people to extraordinary high levels of physical and sexual assault (38% of young women reported a sexual assault in the previous 12 months). This group is also three times as likely to be in the high-level mental health risk group. Finally, a recent 10-city study by Covenant House International of exploitation on the streets identified that one in five youth were trafficked, mostly for sexual purposes. (Murphy, 2016) .

All of this points to key conclusions:

- *For young people at risk of or who experience homelessness, we are waiting too long to intervene. In many jurisdictions, services for young people who experience homelessness are not available until they are 16 or even 18 years of age.*
- *For young people, the experience of homelessness for any length of time can have a devastating impact on health, safety, mental health and well-being. We cannot expect this vulnerable population to “bootstrap” themselves out of homelessness.*
- *Those who do experience homelessness should be assisted in exiting this situation through the model of Housing First for Youth, an adaptation of Housing First that focuses on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults.*
- *By responding to youth homelessness in a more effective manner, we will decrease the likelihood that they will experience chronic homelessness as adults.*

Definitional work is critically important if we are to address youth homelessness in an integrated manner. It is suggested that HPS adopt the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness, developed in partnership with community and endorsed by the Canadian Observatory on 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.”

(Gaetz, 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:

- *Unlike the majority of homeless adults, young people leave homes defined by relationships, both social and economic, in which they were typically dependent upon adult caregivers.*
- *Youth, in the process of transitioning toward adulthood, may not have yet acquired 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.*
- *Youth tend to seek, access and respond to services and supports differently than other homeless individuals.*
- *Young people often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities.*
- *The age at which one is legally considered a child or adult is not consistent across jurisdictions and policy areas, which can result in barriers to accessing services and supports. This can also create problems in terms of continuity of care.*

Additionally, it is suggested that HPS expand their definition of chronic homelessness to include those “at-risk of becoming chronically homeless.” This, in part, will provide additional flexibility for communities looking to design, implement and fund prevention focused activities for youth.

Making the shift

There is recognition that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness, in terms of its causes and conditions—in turn, so must be the solutions. Not only have attitudes shifted about the need to prioritize youth homelessness, the conditions necessary to support such a shift have begun to take hold:

COMMUNITY ACTION

There are at least 10 communities across the country engaging in processes to plan and implement youth homelessness strategies, and many more have indicated a readiness to do so.

PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL ENGAGEMENT

Alberta is the first provincial or territorial government to release a youth homelessness strategy, while Ontario has made this one of its four key homelessness priorities. Other provinces, including Newfoundland and Labrador and Manitoba, have signaled a strong interest in moving in this direction.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND READINESS

A Way Home, a cross-sectoral coalition employing a solutions-focused approach to systemic change, program planning and implementation, will support communities to engage in this work. A Way Home is dedicated to co-creating and amplifying solutions with communities and all levels of government.

Current Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) efforts reflect a commitment to responding to youth homelessness. The following recommendations expand and enhance HPS with a core component of the strategy focusing on supporting Housing First for Youth and youth homelessness prevention through community systems planning. Youth under the age of 25 require programs and services that address their unique developmental needs and issues. Additionally, the resources provided at the federal level need to be flexible, meaningful, and timely to be client-driven and meet each young person's needs within their local context.

- *Priority must be given to prevention programs that divert and keep young people out of shelters and provide them with appropriate and adequate supports. Youth-specific prevention programs must focus upstream to intervene well before a youth becomes homeless.*
- *Without proper exit planning and supports, youth leaving corrections, physical/ mental health, and child welfare systems may also find themselves without a home.*
- *Adapting Housing First to the needs of youth is critical for their housing success and a healthy transition to adulthood.*

The outcomes for the youth-focused HPS stream should be consistent with the outcomes with the broader HPS outcomes; however, they are unique in that they recognize the unique life circumstances for youth and place an emphasis on family and natural supports.

At the core of this HPS stream, there should be a focus on a **Rights Based Approach**. Prolonged experiences with youth homelessness and the risk of entering into homelessness exist because of a lack a coordinated and integrated response in communities. Policies, laws and strategies aimed at youth homelessness must recognize international human rights obligations, and be grounded in a human rights framework that will inform all stages of development, implementation and evaluation. This rights-based approach should mirror the groundbreaking legislation introduced by the Welsh Government in 2015, which places a duty on local authorities to try and prevent or relieve homelessness for everyone who seeks housing assistance and is either homeless or at risk of homelessness. A commitment of this kind would signal that Canada is part of the international movement towards more prevention-focused homelessness policies.

A) Community planning and systems coordination

Ending youth homelessness involves a number of critical elements and actions. These include the implementation of innovative programs and housing solutions tailored for the specific needs of young people, as well as structural changes within the operations of homeless-serving systems. The transformation of public systems, including child welfare, education, mental health, income supports and criminal justice, and their enhanced integration which can facilitate broad systems of care is essential. There are dynamics that are unique to each community that must be accounted for in local efforts and plans. For instance, the overrepresentation of particular demographics in the local homeless population, such as Indigenous youth, makes a difference in the design of interventions. Addressing the issue in a rural or urban setting impacts system planning approaches and resources needed considerably.

HPS-designated communities must begin to align and organize themselves around the issue of youth homelessness. Communities can't simply respond to youth homelessness in the same way they respond to homelessness in general. An integrated response to youth engages child welfare, youth justice systems, education, income supports systems which means designated communities must leverage different stakeholders.

HPS has asked that Community Advisory Boards (CAB) and Regional Advisory Boards (RAB) be:

RESPONSIVE

Decisions regarding community priorities and related activities respond to real and relevant needs, typically identified through shelter data, project results, etc.

REPRESENTATIVE & INCLUSIVE

Decisions are seen as community-driven and representing the collective interest of a majority of community stakeholders on how best to address issues.

CONNECTED

Decisions and activities are integrated within the broader scope of homelessness actions in the community through relationship building.

RESULTS-BASED

Projects implemented demonstrate results which, in the case of Designated Communities, are related to the outcome indicators identified in the Community Plan.

ACCOUNTABLE

Decisions are made in a transparent and unbiased fashion, and CABs/RABs are accountable to the community(ies) they serve.

HPS must ensure that these accountabilities include a commitment to responding to youth homelessness. HPS supports 61 designated communities and some small, rural, northern and Indigenous communities across Canada to develop local solutions to homelessness. Those designated communities' solutions to homelessness must include specific strategies or plans that focus on how they will respond to youth (between 13 - 24 of age) homelessness.

¹ [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#)

B) Program interventions

Central to the HPS renewal, there should be program models that will enable communities to make the shift to an approach that focuses more on prevention and helping young people exit homelessness. The proposed program interventions are based on research from Canada and elsewhere in the world (the U.S., UK, Australia and Scotland in particular). Many of these program models have a strong evidence base, while others are promising practices. These models can be applied in urban, suburban, rural and remote communities. Below is an overview of effective program models:

SUPPORTING RAPID EXITS FROM HOMELESSNESS

Effective strategies to help youth leave homelessness as quickly as possible should be central to the renewed Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Such an investment would also support the current Federal prioritization of Housing First, except in this case it is based on the Housing First for Youth Framework (Gaetz, 2017). It is critical that different models of accommodation are included in Housing First for Youth to address youth's developmental needs to prevent future homelessness. There needs to be a recognition that permanent housing may not always be realistic for youth through this developmental stage where they may shift through different housing options such as living with a partner or roommate, program housing, etc. HPS needs to focus youth outcomes on increased housing stability opposed to securing permanent housing. Communities will need resources and technical support to adapt and implement these program models. Key program interventions to support young people to exit homelessness include:

It is critical that different models of accommodation are included in Housing First for Youth to address youth's developmental needs to prevent future homelessness.

HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH

Housing First is perhaps the one homelessness intervention which can be defined as a "Best Practice." However, as the At Home/Chez Soi project has demonstrated, when the adult-focused model is applied to youth, the results are not compelling (Kozloff et al., 2016). The Housing First for Youth model, described in the document "A Safe and Decent Place to Live" (Gaetz, 2014) was developed through engagement with national and international partners including researchers, service providers, and youth with lived experience of homelessness, and believes in the paramount importance of youth voice and choice in program development. Based on the understanding that the causes and conditions of homelessness are distinct for youth and therefore so must be the solutions, the Core Principles of Housing First for Youth must include:

- A) A right to housing with no preconditions
- B) Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination
- C) Positive youth development and wellness orientation
- D) Individualized, client-driven supports with no time limits
- E) Social Inclusion and community integration²

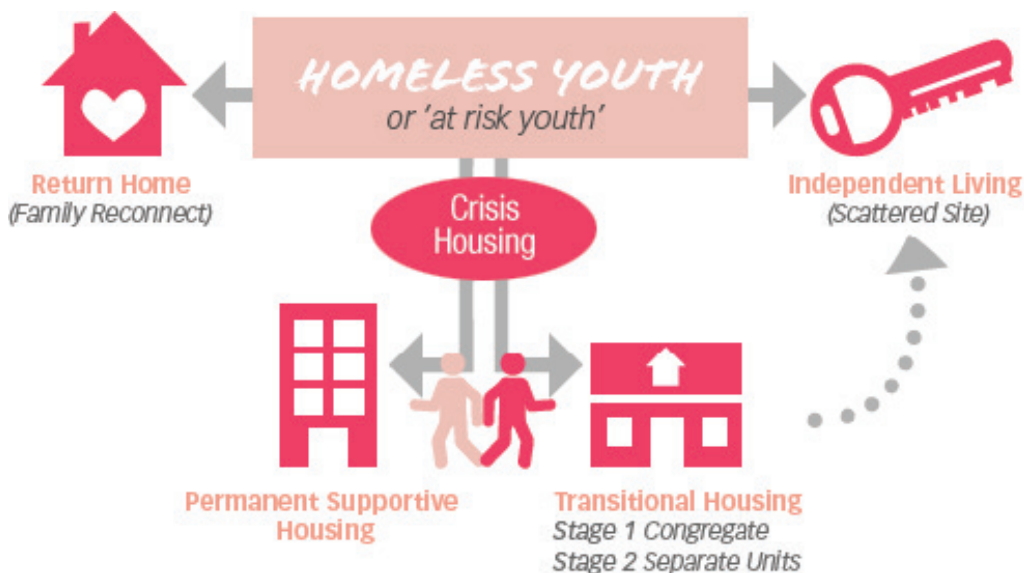
²The Housing First for Youth framework has been updated since it was first released in 2014. Based on a broad international consultation, the core principles have been refined, and are presented here. A fuller discussion can be found at this link. The revised framework will be released in the fall of 2017.

Models of Accommodation and Support within Housing First for Youth

A key principle of Housing First for Youth is **Youth Choice, Youth Voice** and **Self Determination**. In other words, young people should have some kind of choice as to what kind of housing they receive and where it is located. These elements must be closely linked to important life skills (tenancy, budgeting, household duties, etc.). While not all communities can offer a wide range of solutions, the following diagram outlines a range of housing options for young people.

There are sometimes questions about the kind of housing that young people should have access to through Housing First. The Pathways model prioritizes the use of scattered-site housing, which involves renting units in independent private rental markets. While this will be an important option, it may not meet the needs of all youth. As in any housing first context, choice is primary, which means there must be options; and in this case, options that are age and developmentally appropriate. While not all communities can offer a wide range of solutions, the following diagram outlines a range of housing options for young people.

Figure 1: Models of accommodation within a HF4Y framework



The focus of **supports** should be to assist adolescents and young adults in their transition to adulthood, not merely to independence. This means not only support for obtaining and maintaining housing, but also supports that enhance health and well-being. It means ensuring young people have access to income, and that if possible, re-engage with education. Life skills development is important for young people who will have little experience of living independently. Cultural supports are essential for Indigenous youths' sense of belonging. Finally, young people need opportunities for social inclusion and meaningful engagement. This includes not only building social relationships and community connections, but engaging in activities that bring meaning and a sense of well-being to young people.

Figure 2: Supports within a HF4Y framework



Youth with complex needs must be matched appropriately with the right level and intensity of care. It is important that they are aware of what services are available to them, and have support navigating the mental health system. While mental health and addictions and housing status are intimately linked, policies and programs have been insufficiently funded and coordinated to enable effective, timely, and appropriate care for some of the most marginalized young people in our country.

Supporting Housing First for Youth With A Canadian Housing Benefit (CHBP)

A Canadian Housing Benefit (CHBP) should be applied to this program intervention. The CHBP would be a joint federal/provincial/territorial portable housing benefit program for Canadians in the most urgent housing need, including people experiencing homelessness and in severe core housing need. Built in collaboration across levels of government, the program would achieve equitable access and improved outcomes for all Canadians, regardless of where they live. National goals and parameters would ensure the objectives of the National Housing Strategy are met.

Provinces would match at least the equivalent of the federal investment, and no less than what each province currently invests in rent supports, RGI social housing or shelter benefits in income support programs. Supplementing current investment with federal funds and harmonizing housing support into a joint federal/provincial/territorial CHBP will allow the provinces to expand support to meet housing need. Provinces may also use CHBP program funding to support RGI tenants in provincially administered social housing. The provincial matching contribution will not supplant the shelter portion of current income assistance or disability supports.

Built in collaboration across levels of government, the program would achieve equitable access and improved outcomes for all Canadians, regardless of where they live.

PREVENTION

Preventing youth homelessness means working upstream to help young people and their families, before homelessness becomes a problem. There are excellent examples of intervention strategies from Canada and elsewhere in the world. The evidence base for the effectiveness of such interventions is strong, and many are ideal for small towns, rural and remote communities. Key interventions that should be included within HPS funding include:

FAMILY AND NATURAL SUPPORTS STRATEGIES

The goal of Family and Natural Supports is to break the cycle of homelessness through the provision of a very focused and client-driven intervention that supports young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, and their family. Case management supports are intended to help mediate conflicts, strengthen relationships and nurture natural supports to help young people move forward with their lives. As a prevention initiative, family reconnection helps young people remain “in place” in their communities, where they can continue in school and stay connected to natural supports (including friends, family members, teachers, etc.).

For young people who have experienced homelessness, it is a key housing stability strategy that prevents the recurrence of homelessness and helps them move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. The outcome is that the young person cultivate and draw on support from family members and other natural supports that are safe and stable.

As a prevention initiative, family reconnection helps young people remain “in place” in their communities, where they can continue in school and stay connected to natural supports (including friends, family members, teachers, etc.).

YOUTH RECONNECT - PLACE-BASED EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

When young people are forced to leave their communities because they are homeless, they not only lose their family and home, but also their community and potentially a web of natural supports, including friends and meaningful adults (neighbours, teachers, coaches, counselors, etc.). Youth Reconnect is a place-based early intervention program. It is a shelter diversion strategy designed to bring a range of services and supports directly to young people (and their families), so that they remain embedded in their system of natural supports, remain in school, and can move forward in a safe and planned way.

Young people are able to access such supports through school, community centres, help lines and centralized intake. A case management approach that combines many of the above prevention strategies is set in motion. Young people and their families are offered supports (including mediation if that is what is needed), housing options are explored (including remaining at home, host homes or living independently), attention is paid to helping young people stay in school or find work.

SHELTER DIVERSION THROUGH HOST HOMES

As a key approach to youth homelessness prevention, Host Home programs are community-based interventions designed to provide young people and their families with community-based supports at the point when a young person is at imminent risk of, or has become homeless. By diverting youth from the shelter, street entrenchment and future homelessness may be reduced. The goal is to provide young people with temporary shelter, usually in a community member's home, so they are able to stay in their community, remain in school and stay connected to their natural supports.

When young people leave home due to family conflict, Host Homes can provide respite accommodation, allowing young people and their family time to cool off. In Host Homes, young people and their families are provided with appropriate community-based case management and supports designed to help them either return home, or move into age-appropriate accommodation in a safe and planned manner.

BETTER TRANSITIONS FROM CHILD PROTECTION

Research consistently points to the high percentage of homeless youth who have had some involvement with child protection services including foster care, group home placements or youth custodial centres. When youth age out of foster care services, they can sometimes lose their housing and support system, which increases risk of homelessness. While a seemingly intractable problem, there are many jurisdictions that have come up with effective program models and interventions that reduce the risk that young people transitioning from care become homeless. In most of these cases this involves much more than simply reforming child protection laws or extending care to an older age. Rather, effective strategies involve partnerships between government, child protection services, and those community-based service providers who have solid experience and expertise in working with at-risk youth.

Youth transitioning from care need ongoing case management, counselling support, and access to employment and education.

Prevention-related funding should prioritize programs that provide youth with transitional housing and the supports they need to build life skills necessary for housing sustainability. As some youth have lived in institutions, such as group homes, and never had the opportunity to live independently, they require unique housing options for healthy transitions to independence. Youth transitioning from care need ongoing case management, counselling support, and access to employment and education. Other prevention initiatives such as Youth Reconnect can support youth in or from care to move towards independence by developing a sense of belonging in community. HPS funds could be maximized with provincial initiatives to address homelessness of this vulnerable population.

Reforming our approach to supporting young people transitioning from care is complex and fraught with many challenges. The consequence of transitions from care for youth is that they fall into a gap where no "system" is responsible for their well-being. This is policy window where the Federal government can play a leadership role and dramatically decrease numbers of youth from care entering into homelessness. A good starting place is to draw together what we know about innovative strategies (such as those listed above), and provide both communities and policy makers with options for adaptation and implementation. This will provide a foundation for discussion, innovation and change.

DISCHARGE PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING YOUTH JUSTICE OR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Young people leaving corrections are at risk of homelessness and reoffending. An effective model of discharge planning and support provides young people with solid case management while in custody, with an aftercare plan upon release, balancing the need for housing with the support required to transition to independent living. It also means helping youth address issues that may have led to or been caused by their incarceration (including mental illness, substance use, trauma history, lack of education and employment skills).

This work would build on existing support models and programs for youth while incorporating aspects of interventions that support post-discharge needs including the Foyer Model, Housing First for Youth, Transitional Housing, Family and Natural Supports programs, employment programs etc. Rooted in a philosophy of Housing First for Youth, an Effective Exits for Youth Leaving Corrections program will not only serve to reduce youth homelessness, but will become an effective crime prevention and public safety program in Canada.

C) Governance and structure

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEE

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. If done well, a strategy to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness will impact the broader homelessness problem, and help the Federal government achieve its goal of reducing homelessness in Canada.

The goal of an FPT Youth Homelessness Committee would be to:

- *Align mandates across all provinces to promote increased focus and a more integrated response to youth homelessness;*
- *Collaborate and support initiatives that contribute to the renewed HPS youth specific outcomes;*
 - *Increased housing stability for youth;*
 - *Prevention of youth homelessness;*
 - *Healthy transitions to adulthood;*
 - *Enhanced educational participation and achievement;*
 - *Stronger employment and labour market participation outcomes; and*
 - *Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.*
- *Alignment of outcomes, performance measures and data demographics;*
- *Strengthen the ability of existing systems to intervene in a rapid, coordinated manner before youth become entrenched in a homeless lifestyle; and*
- *Bring government and community stakeholders together to support and enable community-driven responses and client-centered approaches to addressing homelessness.*

An investment that prioritizes prevention and ensuring young people exit homelessness will also reduce the likelihood of homeless youth experiencing chronic homelessness as adults. By supporting healthy transitions into adulthood, participation in education and community engagement, we are investing in health and well-being, enhanced employability, and reduced risk that young people will rely on benefits and supports as they age. This longer-term return on investment is potentially quite considerable, will improve the lives of young people across the country, and strengthen Canadian families and communities.

D) Data collection and research

We have a significant opportunity to resolve the information gaps that currently make it challenging to understand and address youth homelessness. Better data and information on the issue of youth homelessness in Canada is a priority, as is evaluating methods of effective implementation, and the effectiveness of services and systems. Improving the collection of information will allow us to better respond to the following questions:

- *What are effective strategies for implementing and scaling evidence based and supported interventions for homeless youth?*
- *What systems would support the implementation of common databases and metrics to enhance evaluation efforts nationally?*
- *What is the composition and size of the homeless youth population in Canada?*

Government and individual agencies are able to relate what services they provide; however, this does not lend itself to a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the issue, or the need for improved services. While agency-level data is the richest source of available information about homeless youth, agencies are collecting data differently, making it difficult to compare between agencies and communities. Moving forward, the Government of Canada should set clear direction and expectations for data collection in partnership with communities and organizations that will be providing the information. Furthermore, Government can greatly enhance the impact of intervention investments by aligning those efforts with rigorous implementation science that support scale and fidelity to models known to be effective.

Moving forward, the Government of Canada should set clear direction and expectations for data collection in partnership with communities and organizations that will be providing the information.

The Government of Canada should streamline and simplify information collection in collaboration with community agencies. This will result in consistent, comparable information across Canada and within provinces that can provide a more accurate picture of youth homelessness and the impact of community interventions. Common outcomes are an important piece of measuring the progress. Community stakeholders have articulated that there is an over-reliance on quantitative outcomes, which may not accurately demonstrate the positive impacts of programs and services. Establishing qualitative measures to evaluate outcomes will enhance current quantitative data collection and ensure that the youth homeless serving system is enhanced.

- *The National Innovation Fund should provide specific funding for organizations to conduct program pilots/ demonstration projects to determine best practices for scalability to prevent, reduce, and end youth homelessness. This will grow the evidence based body of knowledge.*
- *Adopt a consistent methodology for Point-In-Time counts to capture youth-specific numbers.*
- *Develop innovative tools and strategies to better collect data on youth homelessness.*
- *Identify best practices and support communities to implement them.*
- *Increase research capacity through existing partnerships with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and postsecondary institutions.*
- *Support the gathering and sharing of knowledge, research, expertise and successful service delivery practices across the country to link research to practice.*

Federal policy levels

Within government, interdepartmental collaboration and responsibility has to be a priority at all levels. Homelessness is a “fusion” policy issue. Much like we cannot expect communities to end youth homelessness in their own, we can’t expect single departments in government to carry the responsibility. Effective policy must carefully involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance.

The Federal government has a number of distinct policy areas that focus on the specific needs to youth that must be seen as key partners within the HPS youth funding stream. Existing policy levers should include:

- *The Youth Justice Fund - The Fund provides grants and contributions to projects that encourage a more effective youth justice system, respond to emerging youth justice issues and enable greater citizen and community participation in the youth justice system.*
- *The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) - One of the MHCC's key focus areas includes establishing the foundation for healthy emotional and social development as well as prevention and early intervention, which are all vital to ensuring the mental well-being of every person in Canada as they progress from childhood to adulthood.*

OUTCOMES

The following outcomes would be anticipated results associated with the implementation of the youth-focused priorities within the HPS renewal. Outcomes guiding the youth HPS stream must be distinct, reflect the uniqueness of youth homelessness and the interventions necessary:

- *Increased housing stability for youth;*
- *Prevention of youth homelessness;*
- *Healthy transitions to adulthood;*
- *Enhanced educational participation and achievement;*
- *Stronger employment and labour market participation outcomes; and*
- *Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless.*

It is important to articulate that selecting an intended individual change or benefits is only a beginning. With targeted responses to youth homelessness, there are sector and systems, community and societal outcomes that draw clearer alignment to other policy portfolios outside of HPS.

SECTOR AND SYSTEMS LEVEL OUTCOMES	COMMUNITY LEVEL OUTCOMES	SOCIETAL LEVEL OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Improved partnership across sectors and systems</i> ■ <i>Collaboration between community organizations to ensure young people have improved access to resources and support</i> ■ <i>Reductions in average length of stay in youth emergency shelters</i> ■ <i>Young people have housing options and supports when discharged from systems</i> ■ <i>Coordinated outreach service delivery</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Reduction in the number of homeless youth in Canada</i> ■ <i>Increased prevention and awareness leads to communities having the supports to identify at-risk youth</i> ■ <i>Improved targeted responses for specific subpopulations</i> ■ <i>Improved community connections for at risk youth</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Increase awareness and reduction in stigma in relation to youth homelessness amongst Canadians</i> ■ <i>Reduction in the number of homeless youth in Canada</i> ■ <i>Improved quality of life for youth and their families</i>

FEDERAL TARGETS

The following targets (2019 - 2024) suggest a new orientation, new Federal leadership on youth homelessness and priority being placed on how to best work with provinces and communities.

MARCH 31, 2020

No youth transitioning from systems of care (Child Intervention, Justice, Mental Health and Addiction programming) will experience homelessness.

MARCH 31 2021

The average length of stay of youth in emergency shelters will be less than 7 days.

MARCH 31, 2023

Youth at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, will have access to targeted housing and services including:

- *500 place-based Supportive Housing units (Foyer model, Permanent Supportive Housing, Host Homes, etc.).*
- *750 affordable housing units specifically for youth.*
- *5,000 rent supplements dedicated to independent youth/youth in families.*
- *1,250 scattered-site Housing First for Youth program spaces.*
- *7,500 Prevention program spaces for independent youth/youth in families that includes connection to family and natural supports family, financial supports to maintain housing and wrap-around supports focused on mitigating homelessness risk.*

MARCH 31, 2024

Youth homelessness in Canada will be reduced by 100%.

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