

CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS
POLICY BRIEF

LEADING THE WAY

*Reimagining Federal Leadership
on Preventing Homelessness*



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Canadian
Observatory on
Homelessness

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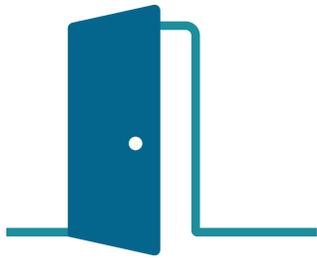
A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention at:
www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection

“I want to live in a world where we view access to housing, basic needs, privacy and dignity as human rights (rather than as privileges)”

– Stasha

ABOUT THIS BRIEFING NOTE

Before us is a significant opportunity to reimagine the federal government’s leadership role in homelessness. After more than 25 years of declining spending on affordable housing, the Government of Canada is launching a National Housing Strategy (NHS) with a 10-year investment in expanding the supply of affordable housing and enhancing sustainable long-term housing outcomes for Canadians. A key pillar of the NHS will be a renewal and redesign of the existing Homelessness Partnering Strategy.



The last renewal of HPS in 2013 saw the Government of Canada play an important leadership role in mobilizing the results of the At Home/Chez Soi study to expand the implementation of Housing First across Canada – in essence, opening the back door to homelessness.

As we turn towards a reimagined national strategy on homelessness, the Government of Canada has an opportunity to show leadership by closing the front door, through supporting a shift to homelessness prevention. This means stopping the flow of individuals and families into homelessness, and at the same time being unwilling to wait for such persons to find themselves in desperate situations – situations that can cause irreparable harm – before we help them exit homelessness. The renewed national strategy on homelessness can help make the shift to prevention through supporting communities to act quickly and creatively, to prevent homelessness before it ever begins.

Toward this end, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) submits a bold vision for a national initiative on homelessness prevention, within a new national strategy on homelessness. The vision presented here can assist the Government of Canada in its commitment to preventing and ending homelessness for generations to come.

IN THIS BRIEF WE COVER THE FOLLOWING:

- [What is homelessness prevention?](#)
- [Can the Government of Canada play a leadership role in homelessness prevention?](#)
- [How can the prevention of homelessness be prioritized within a reimagined national strategy on homelessness?](#)

I. Understanding homelessness prevention

Should homelessness prevention be a priority for the Government of Canada? When considering any major social and health issue — crime, dropping out of school, automobile safety, diabetes, and the spread of infectious disease — it is well understood that it makes sense to invest in prevention rather than wait until things get out of hand. It not only leads to better impacts for people, but is also generally more cost effective — hence the old saying, “a penny of prevention is worth a pound of the cure.”



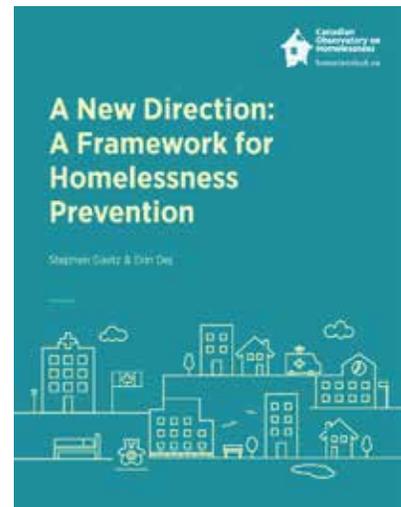
So while it is broadly understood by the general public that prevention makes sense, and it has been embraced to greater or lesser degrees across a number of policy areas, there has been a reluctance to consider the wisdom and value of prevention when it comes to homelessness, particularly in North America. Rather, over the past 25 years, much more effort, attention, and investment has been made in “managing” the problem through the use of emergency services, also known as the “crisis response.” This means that our response to homelessness has, for the most part, focused on helping people [after](#) they have lost their housing. This [has led to](#) “a situation that [Lindblom](#) warned about nearly 20 years ago, one in which an absence of a prevention-oriented policy framework would lead to the institutionalization of homelessness.”

Certainly, over the past 10 years we have seen an important shift in direction as communities across Canada have come to embrace Housing First as an alternative to the crisis response. Here, the Government of Canada has played a leadership role in making Housing First an important policy and practice direction in Canada. Bolstered by the success of the At Home/Chez Soi project and successful community efforts in Alberta, the Government of Canada renewed the [Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2013](#). The renewal set a strong policy direction supporting a shift to Housing First, particularly in addressing the needs of the chronically homeless with acute mental health and addictions issues. We are becoming better at opening the back door of homelessness by assisting people to move out of dire situations by providing them with necessary housing and supports.

As we shift from relying on emergency services to manage the problem, key questions remain: Do we only address homelessness as a problem after it has occurred? Must we only be concerned about addressing the needs of individuals once their problems become chronic and acute? Most importantly, where does the prevention of homelessness fit in our response?

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

While most people “get” that the prevention of homelessness is generally a good thing, it isn’t always clear what we mean by the concept. In order to address the lack of definitional clarity, the COH released [A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#). The Definition of Homelessness Prevention and accompanying typology are complementary features of the framework designed to outline the legislation, policies, collaborative practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. In this framework, homelessness prevention is defined as:



“Policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.”

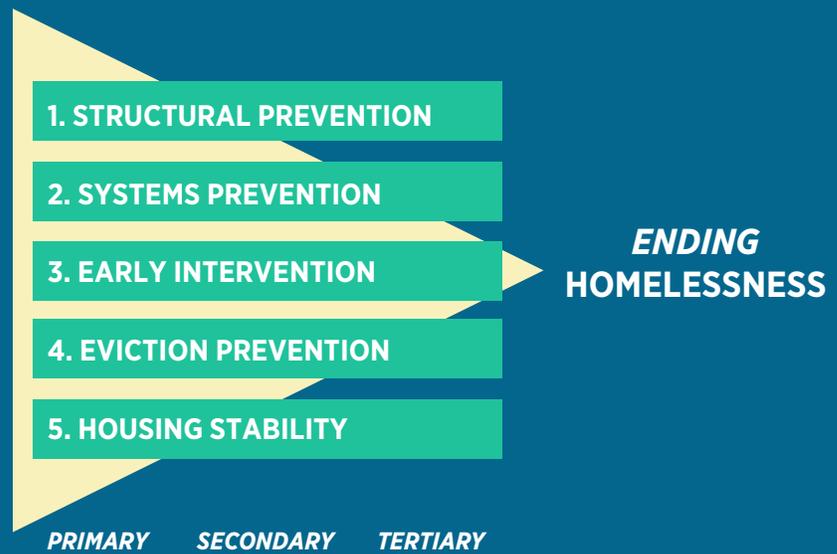
As we move towards a national homelessness prevention initiative, a key goal is building a collective understanding about what constitutes homelessness prevention and just as importantly, what it is not. Services and supports provided to people in an emergency context such as helping people to improve their health, develop life skills, etc., may be beneficial, but we cannot consider these homelessness prevention initiatives. In other words, only policies and initiatives designed to stop people from becoming homeless in the first place, or once they have exited homelessness, fit this definition.



In developing a national, prevention-based homelessness agenda, it is the role of the federal government to build alignment around a common definition and to set clear guidelines and parameters as to what homelessness prevention entails, much like the existing Homelessness Partnering Strategy did with Housing First.

THE TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The Homelessness Prevention Framework includes a typology that outlines five areas where the legislation, policies, interventions, and practices can contribute to the prevention of homelessness in Canada.



FIVE ELEMENTS OF THE TYPOLOGY ON HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

- 1. STRUCTURAL PREVENTION:** Legislation, policy, and investment to address risks of homelessness and increase social equality. E.g. situating housing as a human right, adhering to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, poverty reduction strategies, and income support, etc.
- 2. SYSTEMS PREVENTION:** Breaking barriers and enhancing access to services and supports. E.g. reintegration supports for those leaving public institutions, such as correctional facilities, hospitals, and child protection systems, etc.
- 3. EARLY INTERVENTION:** Responding to those at imminent risk of homelessness and providing crisis intervention to those who have recently experienced homelessness. E.g. effective outreach, coordinated intake and assessment, client-centered case management, and shelter diversion, etc.
- 4. EVICTIONS PREVENTION:** A type of early intervention, programs designed to keep people stably housed and avoid eviction. E.g. landlord/tenant mediation, rental assistance, emergency financial assistance, and legal advice and representation, etc.
- 5. HOUSING STABILITY:** Supporting people who have experienced homelessness to find and maintain housing. E.g. Housing First and supports to enhance health and well being, educational and employment, and social inclusion, etc.

The five elements of the typology work in concert to prevent homelessness, and span upstream approaches that focus on structural and institutional prevention, systems approaches to stop the flow of individuals from mainstream institutions into homelessness, and interventions designed to support people to reduce the risk of homelessness.



The approach to homelessness prevention suggested by our definition and typology necessarily requires:

- *All orders of government be engaged in homelessness prevention. Higher levels of government set policy and provide funding to support communities (which deliver the services) to adapt and implement prevention strategies based on local need and conditions;*
- *Within government, an integrated systems response that includes mainstream services and institutions (both public and private) and not the homelessness sector alone;*
- *At the community level, an integrated systems approach is also required. Homelessness service providers must work within a coordinated system (including mainstream services) with shared goals and data sharing. Mainstream service providers must necessarily be part of this integrated system for prevention to work;*
- *Data management and information sharing systems are necessary for effective systems integration. An integrated data management system should allow for early identification of people at risk of homelessness and tracking people through systems to ensure individuals and families get their needs met. Essentially, one becomes a client of the system, not just an agency;*
- *Coordinating prevention and Housing First strategies (including a philosophy that guides community planning) to address homelessness and ensure that for all individuals and families, their experience of homelessness is short, rare, and nonrecurring; and*
- *Evaluation and implementation of a system that allows for feedback and continuous improvement must be central to prevention policy and practice, both within and across communities and higher levels of government.*

II. Federal leadership on homelessness prevention

In Canada, all orders of government have a role to play in homelessness prevention. As a “fusion policy” issue, homelessness touches on many of the responsibilities of senior levels of government, including health care, housing, corrections and criminal justice, child and family services and supports, income supports, education, employment and training, etc. All of this begs the question of the role of the Government of Canada in homelessness prevention.

One of the key lessons learned from the 2013 renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is the importance of federal leadership on homelessness. As mentioned above, by prioritizing Housing First not only through policy recommendations, but funding, the Government of Canada has had an enormous impact on taking Housing First to scale. This would not have happened had the Government of Canada not provided leadership and support to communities, provinces, and territories.

With the renewal of a national strategy on homelessness, there is a similar opportunity for the federal government to demonstrate leadership by establishing a national strategy on homelessness prevention to complement its continuing investment in, and focus on, Housing First. Having made progress on opening the back door out of homelessness, we can now also focus on closing the front door.



A NATIONAL STRATEGY ON HOMELESSNESS THAT PRIORITIZES PREVENTION SHOULD EMBRACE THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- *The prevention of homelessness can exist as a priority alongside the necessary focus on Housing First to help people exit homelessness and achieve housing stability;*
- *To support a shift to prevention, there will need to be a **dedicated investment** by the Government of Canada;*
- *Funded prevention initiatives need to clearly **align with the definition of homelessness prevention**, provided here;*
- *Effective homelessness prevention cannot be the responsibility of the homelessness sector alone, so opportunities for **interministerial collaboration and co-funding** of initiatives should be prioritized;*
- *In respecting provincial/territorial/Indigenous jurisdictions, the Government of Canada must **work with other orders of government** to align and collaborate on homelessness prevention; and*
- *Because there are gaps in our knowledge about what works and for whom, homelessness prevention should be a priority for investments in **research and innovation**.*

In summary, moving towards a prioritization of homelessness prevention will require a strong policy framework and investment. It will also require innovation, experimentation, and a tolerance for risk, characterizations not often attributed to the public sector. Fortunately, the current federal government — alongside communities, provinces, and territories — are entering a new era, one that allows for the innovation and improvements required to sustainably prevent and end homelessness.

The good news is that we do not have to start from scratch. Homelessness prevention is not new. There are examples of program and community level interventions across the country and abroad (see Appendix A). However, in Canada, there has been a lack of demonstrable success incorporating these interventions into a coherent and broad-based strategy at the national, regional, and community levels.

CAN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION BECOME A PRIORITY?

A common barrier to moving in the direction of homelessness prevention — at least in North America — is the belief that it is difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate that a prevention-based intervention actually stopped any given individual from experiencing homelessness. This is because the causes of homelessness are complex and involve a number of interacting factors that may play out in different ways from individual to individual. While prediction is a challenge, we need to consider outcomes at an aggregate (population based) level rather than simply assessing the impact on a given individual. That the seasonal flu vaccine is effective with only 50-70% of cases does not stop us from investing in it because at a population level it reduces incidences — and the spread — of the virus.

With regards to homelessness prevention, there is a growing body of research that demonstrates that an [investment](#) in the prevention of homelessness [pays dividends](#). A [2016 cost benefit analysis](#) from the United Kingdom suggested that preventive measures focusing on early intervention would reduce the public cost of addressing homelessness from \$56,000 (CDN) per person annually, to \$14,924 (CDN).¹

In building a national homelessness prevention strategy, the Government of Canada can also draw on examples from a number of other jurisdictions both internationally and within Canada that have moved in this direction (see Appendix 1 for details). [Australia](#) provides one of the most successful examples of homelessness prevention with a federal initiative launched in the early 1990s. The Reconnect program focuses on early intervention, mobilizing partnerships between community-based organizations and schools, targeting youth and their families. The program, which has evolved over time, has reduced the risk of homelessness for [72% of its users](#).



¹ Though this is a UK study, the figure for the annual cost of supporting someone who is homeless is consistent with recent [Canadian estimates](#).

In Europe, countries such as Finland, Ireland, England, and Wales have prioritized and invested in homelessness prevention. [The Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) has proven transformative in Wales, even over a short period time. Grounded in a rights-based approach, the Act dictates that local authorities are legally required to take reasonable steps toward preventing and alleviating homelessness. By creating a fiduciary responsibility to prevent homelessness, the Welsh Government has created accountability, triggering an almost [instant reduction](#) in emergency shelter use.

Similarly, [England's Homelessness Act 2002](#) — which mandated that local authorities produce strategies to prevent homelessness — created a 46% reduction in the number of households experiencing homelessness. By implementing strategies similar to those identified in the [Homelessness Prevention Framework](#), England saw a 70% reduction in statutory homelessness² from 2003 – 2010. This past year, the British Parliament showed its commitment to prevention by passing legislation similar to the Wales model.

There are also compelling Canadian examples of provinces and communities that have embraced homelessness prevention. In Quebec, the homelessness strategy [Politique nationale de lutte à l'itinérance – Ensemble pour éviter la rue et en sortir](#) prioritizes homelessness prevention, which manifests in different and innovative ways across jurisdictions in the province. Likewise, Alberta's [A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness](#) prioritizes prevention with concrete directions on how to achieve this.

Additionally, a wide range of communities in Canada are embedding prevention in their community plans in demonstrable ways, including Edmonton, Quebec City, Montreal, St. Catharines, Medicine Hat, Yellowknife, and St. John's (among others). These communities have been particularly innovative and bold. However, shifting to prevention one community at a time is unlikely to have a sizeable impact on preventing and ending homelessness on a national scale.

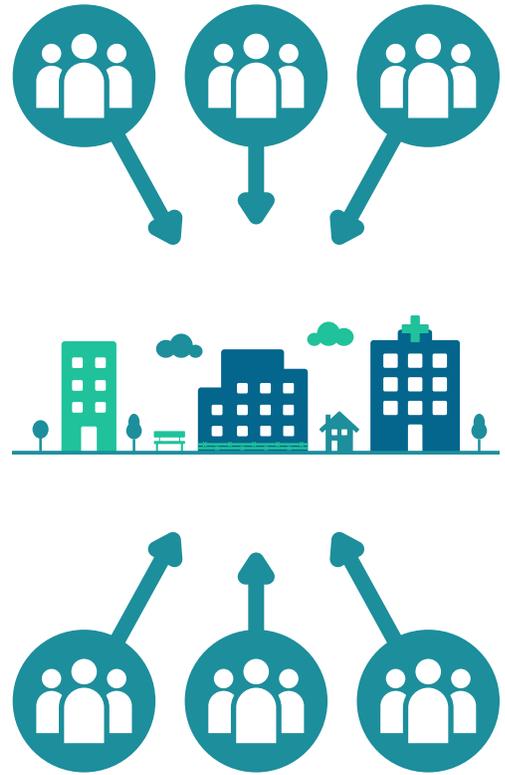
To see homelessness prevention adopted broadly across the country, the federal government must provide leadership, financial resources, and support.

²Statutory homelessness is a qualification under English law that presents a duty to local authorities to provide assistance. In order to qualify, applicants are assessed on five criteria: is the applicant at risk of or experiencing homelessness?; is the applicant eligible for assistance?; is the applicant priority need?; is the applicant intentionally homeless?; Does the applicant have a local connection?

ARE COMMUNITIES READY FOR A SHIFT TO HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION?

Encouragingly, there is emerging consensus that preventing homelessness should be a collective priority in Canada. With a strong commitment to homelessness prevention, the federal government is not setting a policy agenda; rather, it is responding to a need identified by communities themselves.

In 2016, the COH conducted a [survey](#) on homelessness prevention, yielding over 600 responses from stakeholders including policy makers, service providers, and people with lived experience. Results showed overwhelming support for prevention, with 89% agreeing that it is possible to prevent homelessness in Canada. More significantly, 98% said that the federal government should prioritize homelessness prevention, a position that was [loudly echoed](#) by participants in the Expert Roundtable on Homelessness, hosted by Employment and Social Development Canada in September 2016.



While one might expect the homelessness sector to agree that prevention is a priority, a [2017 public opinion study](#) conducted by Vox Pop Labs, showed broad support from Ontarians for the prevention of homelessness. Close to 80% of Ontarians surveyed agreed that the Canadian government should be legally obligated to help prevent homelessness. This was especially true among 18 – 29 year olds, with 60% strongly agreeing that the Government of Canada should have a legal obligation to prevent people from becoming homeless.

Through Housing First and other proven interventions, communities are widely committed to ending homelessness for those experiencing it. But there is also growing agreement that a sustainable end to homelessness will require more than a crisis response. In the COH-led survey mentioned above, 94% agreed that more resources should go to homelessness prevention, even if it means in the long run there will be less need for existing emergency services and supports. Communities want to act sooner, and do more. It is the responsibility of the federal government to provide the leadership, tools, and resources to do so.

III. Proposal for a National Homelessness Prevention Strategy

We assert that there is a strong foundation for a national homelessness prevention initiative. With the reimagined federal homelessness initiative, there is an opportunity. With that opportunity comes consensus that prevention-based approaches will sustain our reductions in homelessness. Further, we now have a framework from which we can build and an emerging evidence base to support it. Communities, provinces, and territories are moving forward. Now it is to the federal government to lead the way.



A commitment to homelessness prevention will help the government to prevent and alleviate homelessness for 500,000 Canadians over the next ten years. But it will do more than that. If the federal government is dedicated to building sustainable, inclusive, and thriving communities — as the upcoming Poverty Reduction Strategy and National Housing Strategy demonstrate — then embracing a bold and articulate homelessness prevention initiative will be the path to success.

The renewed federal strategy on homelessness cannot scale a national prevention initiative alone; much of the implementation must be led by other orders of government, including self-governing Indigenous Nations and band councils. But, it can provide a vision and a foundation to innovate, partner, and mobilize.

LEADING THE WAY: A FOUR-POINT PLAN

We provide a four-point plan for the federal government to lead the way on the national homelessness prevention initiative. Through alignment, investment, innovation, and partnership, we will see sustained reductions in homelessness over the next ten years. The four-point plan involves:

- 1. Alignment** – *Connecting the homelessness prevention strategy to other government priorities.*
- 2. Investment** – *A Prevention Funding Stream.*
- 3. Innovation** – *Identifying what works and for whom in homelessness prevention.*
- 4. Partnership** – *Exploring opportunities for shared responsibility, collaboration, and investment.*

Below is an elaboration of the four-point plan, with concrete examples from other jurisdictions to illustrate how a focus on homelessness prevention can fit within a renewed national strategy on homelessness. Prevention, along with a continued focus on, and investment in, Housing First, provides an opportunity for the Government of Canada to have a major impact on homelessness over the next ten years.

1. ALIGNMENT

CONNECTING THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVE TO OTHER GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES



In the typology of homelessness prevention outlined in [A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#), the first element is **Structural prevention**. Structural approaches to homelessness prevention can be directed at:

“Individuals, families, communities, or the entire population. The goal of structural prevention is to enhance housing stability and inclusion by promoting anti-poverty strategies and initiatives, income security, access to appropriate housing, inclusion, safety, wellness, and security of tenure. In most cases, such programs’ policies and legislation are rarely titled ‘homelessness prevention’ (and may not even explicitly reference it), but will have the outcome of building assets and reducing the risk that someone will fall into homelessness.”

The prevention of homelessness is not and cannot be the sole responsibility of the homelessness sector. Historically, the federal mandate on homelessness has been to support local responses to homelessness. However, addressing broader structural factors that contribute to homelessness requires active engagement with federal ministries and engaged collaboration with other orders of government.

As part of the federal response to homelessness there should be active efforts to align the prevention agenda with other government priorities. Structural prevention can be addressed through alignment with broad federal initiatives such as:

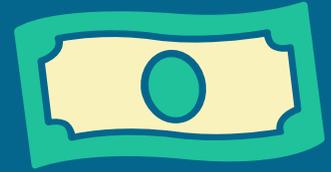
- *The National Housing Strategy;*
- *The Poverty Reduction Strategy;*
- *Taking up [Calls to Action](#) outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a means of responding to the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness; and*
- *Federal efforts that reduce systemic discrimination of women, racialized minorities, LGBTQ2S individuals, etc., especially as it relates to restricted access to housing.*

Structural prevention is especially effective when federal leadership is established through legislation and policy. You will find more information on these and other international examples in Appendix A:

- *The Finnish government created a national strategy for preventing homelessness; and*
- *Wales recently introduced [legislation](#) that mandates local authorities to engage in homelessness prevention that is tailored to their communities. In practical terms, this means all persons deemed to be at imminent risk of homelessness are offered preventive support.*

2. INVESTMENT

A PREVENTION FUNDING STREAM



To properly resource prevention in communities across the country, the new national strategy on homelessness will require a direct investment in homelessness prevention through a dedicated funding stream. The federal investment should set clear parameters as to what constitutes the prevention of homelessness and what does not. Further consultation and research are required to develop more detailed funding guidelines. Such a funding stream could be separate, or the existing threshold requirements for investment in Housing First be increased over a five year period with an expanded mandate to allow communities to invest in “housing led” solutions including either Housing First or prevention-focused initiatives that assist people in retaining their housing in a sustainable way.

Below we provide programmatic examples for four of the five elements of the homelessness prevention typology.

A) Systems prevention: The Government of Canada will take a leadership role by encouraging partnerships between sectors to engage in homelessness prevention. Systems prevention will include breaking down barriers to services, such as funding solutions to linguistic and cultural impediments or retrofitting buildings to eliminate physical barriers for those with disabilities, for instance. Systems prevention also opens up the possibility of funding partnerships with its provincial counterparts to address systems failures.

Examples of effective homelessness prevention include:

- *Lion's Gate Hospital in Vancouver has established an effective [discharge planning program](#), where 88% of those leaving the mental health facility are discharged into housing;*
- *In the U.S., the John Howard Society's [Solid Start program](#) has positive long-term outcomes when people leaving prison are provided supportive housing; and*
- *[First Place for Youth](#) in Oakland, California offers four programs to support youth transitioning from care. [My First Place](#) is their flagship program and adapts Housing First to provide current and former foster kids, ages 18-24, with access to housing, education, and employment support in five California counties. This model has been adapted in Lethbridge, Alberta and is now the focus of a demonstration project in Toronto as part of the Making the Shift – A Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab initiative.*

B) Early intervention: Crisis intervention for those at imminent risk of homelessness and early intervention for those who have recently become homeless are key to preventing the harmful [effects of homelessness](#), including the development or worsening of physical and mental health conditions, victimization, and drug dependence.

- [The Boys and Girls Clubs](#) of Calgary offers several early intervention programs for youth that provide intake and assessment, case management, systems navigation, and family connection supports, for instance;
- [The RAFT program](#) in St. Catharines, Ontario operates Youth Reconnect, where young people (and their families) in small towns and rural areas surrounding the city are provided with case management and supports to bolster family and natural supports, enhance school engagement, and keep young people in place so they avoid homelessness;
- [The Upstream Project](#) (Raising the Roof) is a community/school collaboration modelled on the Geelong project in Australia. School wide assessments (beginning at age 12) identify youth at risk of homelessness, dropping out and/or criminal involvement. Young people and their families are provided with supports to mitigate these risks; and
- In Victoria, Australia, the [Women's Homelessness Prevention Project](#) finds immediate stable housing for women and their children, most of whom are experiencing violence. The program estimates that preventing homelessness for 62 women and their children renders a savings of almost \$2 million (CDN) in health, justice, and social assistance costs.

C) Evictions prevention: Supporting people to stay in their homes is less costly and maintains community connections. Organizations across Canada have developed a number of programs that seek to prevent evictions:

- [Winnipeg's Community Wellness Initiative](#) assists tenants who are at-risk of eviction. Of the 110 individuals enrolled in the program, only one was evicted. Equally promising is that there was little repeat program use;
- [The Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto](#) provides evictions prevention, such as landlord mediation, to women at-risk of eviction; and
- The [STEP Home Flex Fund](#) program in Waterloo provides immediate and flexible funding to maintain housing stability. The fund has been used to top-up rents, provide first/last month's rent, and fund housing repairs. Results show that the program is highly cost-effective, given that it is ten times less expensive to provide a person with housing and support than the cost of emergency services.

D) Housing stabilization: This involves supports both for people who are at risk of homelessness, and for those who have exited from homelessness. The document [Holding On! Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House](#) provides a number of approaches to housing stabilization in Canada. It should be pointed out that Housing First is the most successful example of a housing stabilization strategy for people who have exited homelessness. Providing people with the supports and services they need to maintain their housing and integrate into the community is essential to ensure that people do not cycle in and out of homelessness, a potentially costly and traumatic result of failing to address the root causes of homelessness.

- [Homeward Trust Edmonton](#) has a well-established Housing First program, where 81% of those in the program, most of whom are chronically homeless, successfully remained housed for more than a year; and
- [Chez Doris](#), based in Montreal, prevents homelessness among Inuit women. In addition to providing services to obtain housing, the Inuit Assistance Program also provides visitation and follow-up services to improve housing stability.

Each of these examples shares an important characteristic: they can be directly linked to reductions in homelessness. That is, they prevent people from experiencing homelessness at all or its recurrence.

While it will be tempting to create a broadly defined prevention funding stream, one that covers activities such as employment and life skills for those currently experiencing homelessness, we need to limit eligible activities to those that have a targeted impact on the housing outcomes of Canadians. Funding initiatives that have a clear sense of who they are targeting and their intended outcomes will ensure [greater efficiency](#) in prevention efforts.

In addition to these programs, the Prevention Funding Stream must provide investment for homelessness prevention among Indigenous Peoples, youth, seniors, women, and veterans. For example:

- [Homeward Bound](#), based out of De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre in Hamilton, Ontario, provides Housing First programming to Indigenous Peoples;
- BC's [Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program](#) directly engages Indigenous individuals and families who are homeless and offers services such as rental assistance, dispute resolution with landlords, etc.; and
- The [Sheffield Institute for Studies on Ageing](#) revealed that two-thirds of those in their study had their first experience of homelessness as a senior and that the cause of homelessness is often the death of a spouse, physical or mental health challenges, or rent arrears. In other words, seniors homelessness is largely preventable with innovative solutions.

3. INNOVATION

IDENTIFYING *WHAT WORKS & FOR WHOM* IN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION?



There is an established evidence base surrounding homelessness prevention. However, we have a significant opportunity to build on that evidence base and develop forward-thinking strategies to create better, more cost-effective outcomes. To do so, we need to apply the same creativity (and tolerance for risk) to social innovation that we see in leading edge private sectors (e.g. technology, finance, energy).

In the United Kingdom, they have used innovative funding on more than one occasion to identify effective preventive practices regarding homelessness. For instance, in the fall of 2016 the government announced [£20 million in funding](#) for local areas to test new approaches to preventing homelessness. The program, titled Trailblazer Funding, was launched to give local authorities the resources to ramp up prevention and take new approaches to reduce homelessness, including:

- *Collaborating with other services to identify at-risk households, and target interventions well before they are threatened with eviction;*
- *Helping people earlier than the statutory 28 days when they are threatened with the loss of their home;*
- *Offering that help to a wider group of people than just those owed the main homelessness duty; and*
- *Testing new, innovative approaches to preventing homelessness to help build the evidence base on what works and test the effects of these approaches in different areas.*

One of the clearest avenues for innovation is the existing Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (ISH) Funding Stream. Launched in 2015, ISH supports the development of innovative approaches to reduce homelessness. By retaining and expanding this fund to include prevention as a key priority, the federal government can provide a platform for communities to reimagine their responses to homelessness. Under this ISH funding stream, homelessness prevention can be advanced in two ways:

A. DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

Prevention-based demonstration projects, or pilots, will encourage stakeholders across the country to test, evaluate, and improve interventions to prevent homelessness. They provide a test bed for new and promising interventions, where communities can undergo a process of ideation, implementation, and impact measurement. Through demonstration projects, we can create proof of concept and scale evidence-based prevention projects across the country.

B. RESEARCH

One of the strengths of the existing Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) has been its commitment to funding research on a range of topics including youth, mental health, families, and newcomers. As a result, we have a much clearer understanding of how to end homelessness in Canada. Funding prevention-based research through the ISH funding stream will help us to better understand and define homelessness prevention in Canada and importantly, measure the impact of this new direction.

The area of youth homelessness is an important one for the Government of Canada to prioritize, given the evidence for effective interventions in this area around the world. This is where the government can demonstrate quick success, and investing in research and evaluation in these areas will help take such innovations to scale.

[Making the Shift](#) – A Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab project, funded by the Government of Canada (Skills Link) in 2017, is an excellent example of how to invest in innovation, research, and evaluation. A collaborative partnership involving A Way Home Canada, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and MaRS Centre for Social Innovation, Making the Shift involves a series of 12 demonstration projects focusing on Housing First for Youth (based on [A Safe and Decent Place to Live – Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth](#)) including: projects targeting youth leaving care and Indigenous youth, prevention initiatives such [Youth Reconnect](#) (based on the RAFT program in St. Catherines), and family and natural supports initiatives. A rigorous program of research and evaluation will provide a solid evidence base and proof of concept to support future investment and taking these models to scale. This project also demonstrates the value of interministerial collaboration within the Government of Canada.

4. PARTNERSHIP

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, COLLABORATION & INVESTMENT



The national homelessness prevention initiative must be founded on collaboration and partnership. We cannot end homelessness without shared accountability — accountability across ministries, orders of government, the homeless-serving sector, and the private sector. It is the responsibility of the federal government to create mechanisms for cooperation, while allowing communities and provinces/territories the flexibility to carry out their mandates.

Following the example of Finnish legislation, the Government of Canada can encourage partnership and collaboration in the national homelessness prevention initiative by routinely and actively identifying parties who have responsibility for addressing homelessness prevention, including different orders of government, different ministries and departments within government, and community partners in the public and private sector.

The Government of Canada can foster partnership through the following:

A) A FORMAL INTERMINISTERIAL WORKING GROUP

Homelessness is a “fusion policy” issue. That is, the causes of homelessness are sufficiently diverse and complex that addressing the issue requires input, resources, and commitment from many government departments. Efforts around similarly complex issues, such as mental health and cannabis legislation, have benefitted from interministerial collaboration.

The interministerial working group, chaired by the renewed national strategy on homelessness, can convene government departments with mandates that overlap with the causes and consequences of homelessness. For example, departments such as Indigenous Services, Crown-Indigenous Relations & Northern Affairs, Justice Canada, Health Canada, Status of Women Canada, Correctional Service Canada, and Infrastructure Canada, among others, have a vested interest in a successful national homelessness prevention initiative.

A truly remarkable step will be for the members of the interministerial working group to recommend co-funding opportunities that span across government mandates including: health, corrections, youth, and Indigenous affairs.

B) FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL (FPT) TABLE

Given that many prevention efforts fall under the mandate of the provincial and territorial governments, a strong federal commitment to homelessness prevention must be coupled with provincial and territorial collaboration. A permanent FPT Table with a focus on homelessness prevention provides a platform for partnership.

The focus of the FPT Table on homelessness prevention can include:

- *Innovative program-design;*
- *Prevention of Indigenous, youth, and seniors homelessness;*
- *Corrections and child welfare reform;*
- *Data collection and impact measurement; and*
- *Outcomes-based funding.*

The FPT Table could have a significant impact by commissioning a homelessness prevention policy and practice audit to identify effective prevention strategies across the country and abroad.

C) ENGAGING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Partnering with Indigenous communities, leaders, and advocates must be a top priority, alongside the Government of Canada's renewed commitment to federal-municipal relations and provincial and territorial collaboration. Numerous studies, including the [2016 Coordinated Count](#) led by HPS, have consistently found Indigenous Peoples vastly overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. This overrepresentation is caused by an ongoing failure to prioritize and address the structural, systemic, and individual needs of Indigenous Peoples.

The national homelessness prevention initiative must be designed and implemented in equal partnership with Indigenous governments and communities. The Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada (forthcoming, October 2017) provides a strong and credible foundation for this work.

IV. Conclusion

The federal investment in addressing homelessness has had a profound effect on how communities address the problem. Demonstrating the role of federal leadership on homelessness, the renewal of HPS in 2013 ushered in an era of significant transformation whereby communities were supported to move from “managing” the problem of homelessness to helping people exit homelessness through a targeted investment in Housing First.



There is now an opportunity for the Government of Canada to once again demonstrate leadership in this area — this time in supporting communities to prioritize the prevention of homelessness, alongside a continued commitment to Housing First. To do so, we can look to successful prevention strategies internationally. Australia, Wales, Ireland, Finland, England, Germany, and Scotland are among the countries that have prioritized prevention in their response to the homelessness crisis. Importantly, many of these countries have introduced legislation on the right to housing as part of their prevention mandate, positioning the government as leaders in prevention efforts.

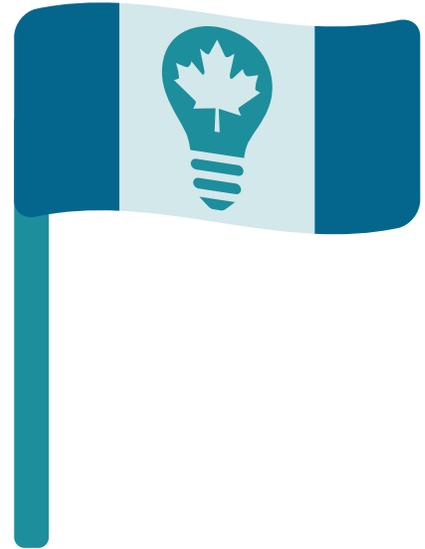
**IF WE REALLY WANT TO END HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA,
WE NEED TO PRIORITIZE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION.**



Appendix A: Homelessness Prevention Case Studies

There is a strong history of homelessness prevention around the globe and at home in Canada. For decades, dedicated communities across Canada have found creative ways to support those at risk of homelessness.

Countries such as England, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, and Australia have scaled up their prevention efforts in a coordinated and consistent effort to prevent homelessness, often through state-level policy and legislation. Their initiatives provide a wealth of evidence that homelessness prevention is effective, cost-efficient, and most importantly, the right thing to do.



With the leadership and support of the Government of Canada, we can take the thought leaders, innovators, and passionate service providers here in Canada and give them the tools to create, expand, and evaluate their progress as we set a new course for not simply managing homelessness, but preventing homelessness in the first place.

A) INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

Homelessness prevention is well-established throughout Europe and in Australia. Much of their success can be attributed to cementing prevention in legislation and policy. As an example of structural prevention, government policies that prioritize homelessness prevention position the federal government as a leader in innovative and effective solutions to addressing homelessness. Canada has an opportunity to learn from and build on the lessons learned in homelessness prevention from our international counterparts and adopt effective strategies to the local Canadian context.



WALES

Recent prevention legislation passed in Wales, [The House \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) has proven to be a catalyst in transforming the homeless-serving sector into one focused on prevention. The Act uses a rights-based approach to position prevention services as a universal right. The legislation provides national leadership for local communities to build on and creates consistency across the country.

In the short time that the Act has been in effect, the results have been astounding. Local authorities across Wales have established a number of prevention-focused services and tools that have proven effective at preventing homelessness. These services, such as crisis intervention, housing advisors, collaborations with the health care system, and financial assistance, to name a few, have seen enormous success.

Since the implementation of the new legislation, [65%](#) of those who sought support to prevent homelessness were successful. Those who received support after becoming homeless had a [45% success rate](#) in securing housing, providing an important lesson on the value of being proactive and reaching people before they become homeless. [1,500 more households](#) were supported to prevent homelessness than those receiving assistance after becoming homeless, demonstrating that the legislation is effective at encouraging communities to prioritize prevention. Moreover, since the introduction of the legislation [80% of households](#) deemed in priority need were successfully housed. Of those not deemed to be a priority, their rate of homelessness [dropped by 59%](#) since the implementation of the prevention legislation. Prioritizing prevention has contributed positively to homelessness across the country. In the last two years, Wales has seen an [18% reduction](#) in the demand for emergency/temporary accommodations. In other words, emergency shelter beds and similar temporary properties are emptying as homelessness is prevented.

ENGLAND

England's Homelessness Act 2002 is an example of how the state can provide leadership and direction for communities to adopt locally informed homelessness prevention agendas. The legislation mandates local authorities to produce a homelessness prevention strategy. In 2005, the state set the target to reduce the number of households living in emergency accommodations by half through prevention measures. As a result, local authorities have developed [a number of prevention interventions](#), including rent deposit assistance, family/friend mediation, supportive housing for victims of intimate partner violence, and initiatives to maintain housing stability for those who have found a home.

In the years that followed the adoption of a prevention approach, the rates of homelessness [fell dramatically](#) in England, particularly among [family homelessness](#). In the five years after the legislation received royal assent, the number of households becoming homeless was [reduced by 46%](#) while the number of households staying in emergency accommodations fell by 11%. Among those who sought prevention services in 2015-2016, 93% successfully maintained their housing. Between 2003-2010, the rate of statutory homelessness [decreased by 70%](#). These prevention efforts have also [proven](#) to be much more cost-effective than the cost of operating emergency services. A recent [study of England's prevention system](#) revealed that the savings accrued from preventing one person from becoming homeless for one year could be \$15,000 (CDN) or more. The shift to homelessness prevention in England provides an excellent example of the positive outcomes that come from helping those in need before they become homeless.

FINLAND

In 2016, the Finnish Government created the [Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland](#) 2016-2019. The objective is to ensure that housing is secured whenever someone interacts with the service system. This means strengthening the prevention of homelessness and preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness. In the plan, the government recognizes that the jurisdictional and organizational divisions between housing, health care, employment, and other services, have made it difficult to identify and respond to those at risk of homelessness. The plan outlines eight measures to achieve homelessness prevention, including:

- *Increasing the affordable housing stock and diversifying the types of housing available;*
- *Mandating cities to develop plans to prevent homelessness that include locally specific measures;*
- *Integrating newcomers and providing housing assistance upon arrival;*
- *Preventing the loss of housing for those experiencing financial strain and ensuring those with low credit ratings have access to housing;*
- *Providing low-barrier housing supports and other services for all who need them, such as those with mental health or addictions challenges; and*
- *Housing support for those leaving the corrections system.*

AUSTRALIA

Australia has a long history of homelessness prevention, particularly in the youth sector. The flagship of homelessness prevention in Australia is the government sponsored [Reconnect program](#). The program was implemented in 1999 in communities across Australia thanks to federal direction. The Reconnect program is an early intervention initiative provided by community-based organizations in partnership with schools to help stabilize and improve the living situation of young people and their families at risk of homelessness. The program also works to ensure that no youth in child protection or corrections exits into homelessness.

The Reconnect program has been extensively evaluated over two decades and is proven to deliver positive outcomes. For instance, [90% of young people](#) who used the program in 2011-2012 had an improved situation and greater stability. [Over 80% of young people](#) had improved school attendance and performance. The program successfully [reduced the risk of homelessness for 72%](#) of its users. Canada has taken the learnings from Australia's Reconnect program and its successor, [The Geelong Project](#), and adapted it to the Canadian context through [The Upstream Project](#), piloting the program in York Region and Niagara Region.

THE UNITED STATES

In Washington State, the [Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Act](#) was passed in 2015. It established the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs, which leads state-wide efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness for youth and young adults. The Act sets out to decrease the number of homeless youth and young adults by identifying programs that address the initial causes of homelessness and ensure that young people experiencing homelessness have access to stable housing, family reconciliation, education and employment, permanent connections, and social and emotional well-being. The Act also seeks to ensure that the state will not discharge young people to the streets from state systems such as child protection and the youth corrections system.

B) CANADIAN EXAMPLES

While we have much to gain from studying prevention efforts around the globe, there are valuable examples of homelessness prevention back at home. Prevention is gaining traction here in Canada, as several provinces and communities across the country have incorporated and even prioritized homelessness prevention in their approach to ending homelessness.



PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS

Quebec

Quebec has been at the forefront of prevention in Canada. As early as 2002, the province of Quebec passed the [Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion](#), an important effort to prevent homelessness at a structural level by reducing the harmful effects of poverty. Following the Act, the province created [Ensemble pour éviter la rue et en sortir](#), where homelessness prevention was established as a key vision in their policy foundations. In 2014, the province of Québec launched [Mobilisés et engagés pour prévenir et réduire l'itinérance](#). The plan includes actions to prevent homelessness, including preventing the maltreatment of children and youth and preventing poverty among adults and seniors.

Alberta

Alberta's [plan to prevent and reduce youth homelessness](#) is rooted in prevention. Prevention is one of the two overarching goals of the plan, along with rapid rehousing. It is also one of four priority areas and includes three strategies: supporting families and parents, developing a standardized needs/risk assessment tool, and building public awareness. The second priority area is early intervention, which looks to make sure youth do not become entrenched in homelessness. Early intervention strategies include: assisting youth immediately after they become homeless, developing life skills in youth to avoid homelessness or a return to homelessness, building resiliency in young people to secure housing, and working within the existing capacity of the youth serving system. Alberta's youth plan provides an excellent example of where prevention is situated as integral to achieving a reduction and end to homelessness.

Ontario

Ontario has taken steps towards addressing homelessness through a prevention lens. Their [Expert Panel](#) advised that a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness must move towards targeting the causes of homelessness upstream. Ontario's inclusion of prevention in their 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness mirrors the shift towards prevention strategies in communities across the country.



COMMUNITY PLANS THAT INCORPORATE PREVENTION

Communities across Canada have been pushing the prevention agenda for decades. Recently, these efforts have paid off and communities are beginning to prioritize prevention in their plans to reduce and end homelessness. For example, [Yellowknife's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness](#) provides prevention-oriented progress indicators in its measures to end homelessness. Proposed initiatives include addressing policy and practice barriers that increase the risk of homelessness; increasing access to rent supports and affordable housing by 2017, and introducing a “zero discharge into homelessness policy” for health, corrections, and child protection services by 2020. Likewise, [St. John's](#) plan to end homelessness incorporates similar prevention strategies, such as integrating public systems to reduce discharging into homelessness, encouraging policy development that reduces homelessness risk, and child, youth, and family services reform to reduce the risk of youth homelessness.

Communities in Alberta have been particularly proactive in developing agendas that prioritize homelessness prevention. Below are some notable examples:

Medicine Hat

Medicine Hat's success in ending homelessness has positioned the city and Canada as an international leader in innovative solutions to addressing homelessness. Medicine Hat continues to produce positive outcomes with Housing First. In their [2017 progress report](#), the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society (MHCHS) found that of the participants who enrolled in Housing First in 2009, 75% have successfully completed the program and maintained housing eight years on.

In 2014, the MHCHS incorporated a [shift towards prevention](#) that works in tandem with the success of Housing First. The MHCHS has implemented several prevention strategies, such as their [rent supplement](#) program that is geared toward individuals at-risk of homelessness who are well suited for the private market or who prefer to remain in their current home. The prevention strategies are working. From April 2016 to March 2017, [58% of those assessed](#) by MHCHS were assisted with diversion supports and 64 people were assisted with transition and discharge planning. Importantly, the MHCHS found that [88% of individuals seeking services](#) do not require interventions as intensive as Housing First. In fact, through various prevention strategies, households were successfully diverted away from homelessness with less intensive and less costly interventions.

Calgary

[Calgary's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness - 2017 Refresh](#) positions prevention as one of its six guiding principles and as one of four key priorities. The Plan sets a target of March 31, 2020 to develop an integrated and unified homelessness prevention response that emphasizes early intervention, awareness-raising, and programs for children, youth, and families. Stakeholders in Calgary recognize that a shift to prevention “may challenge prevailing norms” but that a strategic focus on preventing youth homelessness will be more effective in the long-term than managing homelessness through an emergency response. In order to achieve positive outcomes, the Plan outlines the coordination and integration of homeless-serving systems with provincial and federal government departments and other mainstream services.

Edmonton

[Edmonton's updated plan](#) to prevent and end homelessness sets out four actions to prevent future homelessness. The updated plan includes specific targets to divert people from entering the homeless-serving system altogether as well as prioritizing systems responses to prevention, including supports for those leaving corrections, health, and the child protection systems. The four prevention actions include: enhancing homelessness prevention and diversion measures to ensure intervention before individuals enter the homeless serving system; increasing and integrating access to mental health, addiction, trauma, and Indigenous wellness supports; increased coordination between systems to mitigate homelessness risk, including reforms to social assistance incomes and rent supplement regulations; and increased public education and awareness about homelessness.

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The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) is a non-profit, non-partisan research institute that is committed to conducting and mobilizing research so as to contribute to real and sustainable solutions to homelessness. We work together as a group of researchers, service providers, policy and decision makers, people with lived experience of homelessness, as well as graduate and undergraduate students from across Canada with a passion for social justice issues and a desire to solve homelessness in our communities. The COH undertakes an ambitious program of research that includes local, provincial and national monitoring activities, as well as original research that not only contributes to the scholarship on homelessness, but enhances the impact of research on solutions to homelessness by establishing an evidence base and knowledge mobilization strategy.