

CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS
POLICY BRIEF

**FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN
YOUTH HOMELESSNESS:**

Comparing Canada & the United States



A Proposal for Reinvestment



COH
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
the
homeless hub



The Need For A National Youth Homelessness Strategy

Over the past 16 years, the Government of Canada, through its National Homelessness Initiative and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, has actively supported communities across the country to address homelessness. While many communities have used part of their federal investment to support youth-focused programs and services, there has not been a strategic focus on youth homelessness since the early years of the program.

In this policy brief, we make the case that there is now an opportunity for the Government of Canada to work with community partners to address youth homelessness in a much more strategic and effective manner. There is a growing recognition that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness in terms of its causes and conditions and it then follows that so must be the solutions. There is also an acknowledgement that we must do things differently; that managing the problem through emergency services is not enough if young people become mired in homelessness and find it difficult to escape. While emergency supports will always be necessary and important, we need to shift our energy and focus to preventing youth from becoming homeless on the one hand, and assisting others to exit homelessness as quickly as possible, and in a safe and planned way with necessary supports.

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:

- **Knowledge base** - A growing body of research, evidence informed practice and policy now supports the proposition that we can effectively end homelessness. Innovative approaches from across the country, as well as effective interventions from around the world, demonstrate how prevention focused approaches reduce the number of young people who become homeless, and shorten the experience of those who do.¹
- **Community action** - There are at least ten 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.

Given growing recognition of the need to do things differently, now is the perfect time for the Government of Canada to work with community partners to address youth homelessness in a much more strategic and effective manner.

There is now an opportunity to move towards a more coordinated pan-Canadian effort to address youth homelessness. In this regard, there is a key role to be played by the Government of Canada. The new government has declared amongst its priorities a focus on youth (with the Prime Minister assuming responsibility for this portfolio) affordable housing, employment, justice reform, positive engagement with Indigenous people and communities, and a new approach to working with provincial and territorial governments. Building on the solid work of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, there is now a real opportunity for the Government of Canada to engage with communities, provinces and territories in the development of a national strategy to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.

Federal Investment In Canada

The Government of Canada first announced a homelessness strategy in December 1999, with the launch of the National Homelessness Initiative, with an original allocation of \$753 million (CDN) over three years, of which \$311M went to CMHC. This meant the annual budget of the National Homelessness Initiative was \$147M or, adjusted for inflation, 211M. In subsequent years – including when the program was renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2007, the program was renewed on an annual or semi-annual basis, with either a flat-lined budget (and no increase for inflation) or a reduced allocation. When the Government of Canada announced the five-year renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2014, the annual budget was reduced once again from \$131M to \$119M, but with a new mandate to focus more of its investment on Housing First.

While the Homelessness Partnering Strategy currently provides program funding to communities to address youth homelessness, there is no targeted strategy or funding stream. This was not always the case. During the first three years of the National Homelessness Initiative (1999-2003), the government allocated **\$59 million targeted for youth homelessness** or almost \$20M annually. Adjusted for inflation, this amounted to a **\$26.5M annual expenditure to address youth homelessness for the years 2000-2003**. This component was delivered through the existing HRDC Youth Employment Strategy (YES), and was discontinued in 2003.

The Federal investment in homelessness has declined from \$211M annually in 1999 to \$119M today. Moreover, an original annual allocation of \$20M to address youth homelessness was dropped in 2003.

Federal Investment In The United States

The United States federal government has a longer history of national programs that address homelessness, going back to the 1970s. At the same time, it invests considerably more than does the Canadian government, targeting \$5.5 billion annually for programs that address homelessness. Moreover, there has long been a significant investment in targeted funding for youth homelessness going back to the 1970s. This funding is directed through different

funding streams, and is an outcome of four key pieces of legislation: the **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)** (1974), the **Foster Care Independence Act** of 1999, the **McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth** (1987); and the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** (2009). Below is a summary of key federal investments in the current budget (2016-17).

ANNUAL US FEDERAL BUDGET EXPENDITURES ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESSⁱⁱ

Runaway and Homeless Youth Act \$170.97 million (\$123M USD)

Education for Children and Youth Act \$99.38 million (\$71.5M USD)

New allocation in 2016: Congress recently approved an additional \$73.39 million (\$52.8M USD)

TOTAL Federal Spending on Youth Homelessness: \$343.75 million (CDN)

Adjusted for the Canadian population size this amounts to an annual investment of **\$37.85 million (CDN)**

HOW IS THIS MONEY SPENT?

EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN & YOUTH

“To ensure that all children and youth experiencing homelessness have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education available to other children, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program provides assistance to States to: (1) establish or designate an Office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youths; (2) develop and carry out a State plan for the education of homeless children; and (3) make sub-grants to local educational agencies to support the education of children experiencing homelessness.”ⁱⁱⁱ Note that much of this is for children in homeless families not unattached youth.

2016 (proposed) - \$71.5 million

RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH ACT

“The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program funds hundreds of community and faith-based organizations through three grant programs that serve the runaway and homeless youth population: the Basic Center Program, the Street Outreach Program and the Transitional Living Program. The President’s Budget requests an additional \$9 million for RHYA over 2015 funding levels. The Basic Center Program establishes or strengthens locally controlled, community and faith-based programs that address the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families. Basic Centers provide youth with temporary emergency shelter, food, clothing and referrals for health care. Other types of assistance provided to youth and their families may include individual, group, and family counseling, recreation programs, and aftercare services for youth once they leave the shelter. Grants can also be used for outreach activities targeting youth who may need assistance. The Transitional Living Program provides shelter, skills training and support services to homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 22 for a continuous period generally not exceeding 540 days, or in exceptional circumstances 635 days. Youth are provided with stable, safe living accommodations and services that help them develop the skills necessary to move to independence. Living accommodations may be host family homes, group homes, or supervised apartments. The Street Outreach Program provides educational and prevention services to runaway and street youth who have been subject to, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation or abuse. The program works to establish and build relationships between youth and program outreach staff in order to help youth leave the streets.”^{iv}

2016 (proposed) - \$123 million

NEW FEDERAL SPENDING FOR THIS YEAR:

“Congressional leaders passed and President Obama signed the FY 2016 omnibus spending bill, which funds all federal operations. We’re excited to announce that this budget bill designates approximately \$52.5 million in new funding for work to address youth homelessness in America. The majority of the money – \$33 million – will be invested by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in up to 10 communities, including four rural communities, across the country to identify successful strategies to end youth homelessness in America. This investment will be vital in informing a comprehensive national approach and aid in reaching the Federal Government’s goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020. An additional \$5 million will be allocated for HUD to provide technical assistance on youth homelessness, as well as \$4.5 million for HUD and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to research youth homelessness. By connecting communities with dedicated resources to aid youth and those who serve them, we will finally get the answers to the many questions we still have about what actually works to end youth homelessness. And, if a young person does find themselves without a home, these resources will support our efforts to ensure that their experience is rare, brief, and one-time.”^v

2016 (proposed) - \$52.5 million

The United States federal government commits \$343M (CDN) annually to address youth homelessness, which adjusted to the Canadian context would equal \$38M (CDN).

The Case For A Renewed Federal Investment

WHY ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SHOULD BE A NATIONAL PRIORITY

Youth homelessness, while a seemingly intractable problem, is one we must urgently address. Approximately 20% of all homeless people in Canada are between the ages of 13 and 25. This means that over the course of the year there are between 35-40,000 young people who experience homelessness, and on a given night at least 6,000. There are no indications that the situation is getting any better. To tackle the problem, we must begin by recognizing that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness in terms of its causes and conditions, and therefore so must be the solutions.

The longer we let young people become mired in homelessness, the more they are exposed to the risks of sexual and economic exploitation, the more likely they are to experience trauma, declining health and addictions, and the greater the difficulty they will have in leaving the streets. Once on the streets it is not long before young people become entrenched in the street youth lifestyle. The long-term consequences are considerable, including:

- Increased risk of exploitation, violence, victimization, physical and sexual abuse.
- Greater involvement with the police and the justice system.
- Disengagement from school and difficulty obtaining employment.
- Stress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide.
- Increased use of substances to cope.

While many young people are able to move forward with their lives because of their incredible strength and perseverance, this is not the case for all homeless youth who many require additional supports and services in order to end their homelessness.

With a renewed federal investment to address youth homelessness, we not only curtail negative consequences, but we create new opportunities:

- Increased housing stability for youth through rehousing (Housing First for youth) or family reunification.
- Increased resiliency in young people and their families.
- Prevention of youth homelessness through education and enhanced family and natural supports.
- Access to education, income and employment opportunities.
- Effective models of accommodation and support that give young people options and choice in how they move forward with their lives.
- Increased high school graduation and labour market participation.
- Healthy transitions to adulthood and well-being.
- Reduced transition to adult (and chronic) homelessness.

If we believe that all young people, regardless of their background, deserve necessary supports and opportunities in order to transition into adulthood and well-being, then we have to tackle youth homelessness head on. Additionally, if we are truly concerned about addressing chronic homelessness amongst adults, we must recognize that for many of those individuals, their pathway into homelessness began when they were young. Early interventions that prevent and reduce youth homelessness may have the impact of reducing the incidence of chronic homelessness amongst adults.

All young people in Canada, regardless of their background or situation, deserve necessary supports and opportunities to be able to transition to adulthood and well-being.

WHAT SHOULD A RENEWED FEDERAL INVESTMENT SUPPORT?

The Government of Canada should directly invest in community strategies that prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. While many communities in Canada currently have some level of service provision that addresses youth homelessness, this for the most part reflects a crisis response (emergency shelters and day programs). Few communities have comprehensive plans or strategies to address youth homelessness. While the crisis response is important, this means that we are primarily ‘managing’ the problem, as opposed to preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness. There is a need to shift direction if we truly want to address this problem.

A Federal investment to address youth homelessness will help communities across the country make this shift, by providing them with the knowledge, direction and resources to achieve results. Federal leadership in this area could at the same time align with and support provincial initiatives, strategies and responsibilities. The Province of Alberta is the first in Canada to develop and implement a comprehensive youth homelessness strategy. Ontario has signaled that youth homelessness is one of its key priority areas. There is a real opportunity for the Federal government to build on and leverage these developments, and provide new opportunities to inspire, catalyze and support other provinces and territories to move in this direction. Finally, the Federal government should work closely with Indigenous communities to develop strategies to support Indigenous youth to reduce the risk that they will enter homelessness. Working in collaboration with all levels of government, there is a real opportunity for the Government of Canada to lead and make a difference.

Given the Government of Canada’s stated interest in supporting youth and young adults and that a targeted strategy to address youth homelessness is currently absent at the Federal level, it is now time for a more proactive Federal role in supporting communities to implement plans that shift the focus from ‘managing’ the crisis to preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness. Key to this will be to provide communities with resources to adapt and implement program models designed to achieve these results. The Government of Canada should make an investment with the intent of ending youth homelessness by 2026. A renewed investment should focus on the following:

Federal investment and leadership can help communities address the problem of youth homelessness by providing them with knowledge, direction and resources necessary to achieve results.

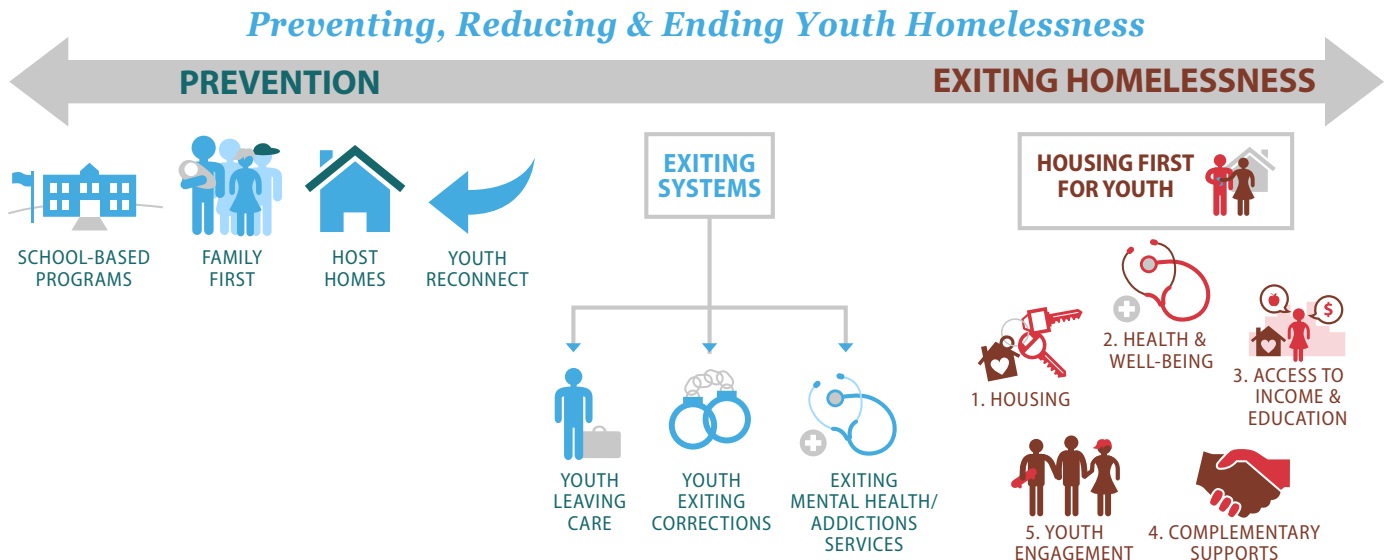
1) COMMUNITY PLANNING

Funding should be available to support communities to develop and implement plans to address youth homelessness that focus on prevention, and on helping young people who are currently experiencing homelessness exit homelessness as rapidly as possible, with the necessary supports they need to make a successful transition to adulthood and well-being. Such plans should set clear targets for the reduction of youth homelessness. They should also align with existing local and provincial plans, and poverty reduction strategies.

It is recommended that the Government of Canada invest in ten new communities of various sizes annually with two years of funding support for planning and implementation for each of the next four years. Through this investment, not only will forty communities be actively engaged in addressing youth homelessness, but this capacity and knowledge base can be leveraged regionally and provincially to build broader support for action. Through the efforts of A Way Home, a significant knowledge base currently exists for planning and implementation, as well as aligning plans with other planning mechanisms to end homelessness and poverty reduction strategies.

2) PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS

Central to community plans are 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 (United States, United Kingdom, 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:



A) YOUTH HOMELESSNESS 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. Communities will need resources and technical support to adapt and implement these program models.

Key interventions include:

- School-based prevention programs
- Family First strategies
- Youth Reconnect - Place-based early intervention programs
- Shelter diversion through Host Homes
- Better transitions from child protection
- Discharge planning and support for young people leaving corrections

Preventing youth homelessness means working upstream to help young people and their families, before homelessness becomes a problem.

B) HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE EXIT HOMELESSNESS

Effective strategies to help youth leave homelessness as quickly as possible are a central feature of a renewed federal investment. Such an investment would also support the current Federal prioritization of Housing First, except in this case it is based on the Housing First framework adapted for youth. 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:

- Housing First for youth (including transitional housing options such as the Foyer)
- Employment training and support
- Mental health and addictions supports, including Harm Reduction
- Reengagement in education

The development of program models to prevent and exit homelessness will provide the Homelessness Partnering Strategy opportunities to engage in strategic partnerships with other Federal ministries (Justice, Employment, Immigration, Indigenous and Northern Affairs, etc.), with Provincial governments, the research community and non-governmental organizations. We recommend a funding stream for piloting these different models (the number of communities / programs to be determined in discussions with other federal ministerial partners). Again there is an opportunity to build a strong evidence base and leverage community experience to support other communities to adapt these successful models.

C) PREVENTION/REHOUSING INNOVATION FUND

Many Canadian communities are implementing innovative models of youth homelessness prevention, and strategies to re-house and support youth. These interventions are ‘promising practices’ for which there may not yet be a strong evidence base. However, funding should nevertheless be made available to support such innovation, with additional funds to support rigorous third party evaluation that will demonstrate program model success and enable scaling out. Areas where we need innovative approaches include supports for young people leaving care and corrections, for instance. This fund could also be used to encourage place-based interventions that foster sectoral collaboration. We recommend funding 11 community innovations annually.

3) SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH

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

4) KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

For youth homelessness planning, as well as many of the program interventions above there is an emerging, and in some cases established knowledge base to support the more robust development of program model frameworks and technical support to enable community adaptation and implementation. In addition, the existence of the HPS-funded Community Workspace on Homelessness for the sector, will provide a platform for the development of knowledge sharing and a community of practice.

Historically, HPS has invested in research and resource development to support its strategies to address homelessness through the Homelessness Knowledge Development program. Additional funds should be added to this program to develop knowledge and resources that support the federal government’s youth homelessness strategy.

While a consideration of the needs of Indigenous youth should run through all planning and program activities that address youth homelessness, it is also important to support the development of Indigenous-led interventions.

5) FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PLANNING TABLE

Federal leadership, direction and investment on the issue of youth homelessness can yield significant policy and practice changes provincially and territorially. This will create the context for greater alignment of policy and funding, sharing of practices and creating a pan-Canadian strategy. This could be a cost neutral partnership that will continue to inform the Federal agenda and open doors for more provincial, territorial and community action in the area of youth homelessness. To achieve maximum impact, Provincial and Territorial governments should be expected to match the Federal investment in order to access funding.

Done well, a strategy to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness will impact on the broader homelessness problem, and help the Federal government achieve its goal of reducing homelessness in Canada. An investment that prioritizes the prevention and reduction of youth homelessness will also reduce the likelihood that young people who are homeless become the chronically homeless adults of the future. 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.

A federal partnership with provincial and territorial governments will help communities achieve impact.

REINVESTING IN ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS, WHAT WILL IT COST?

In the early days of the National Homelessness Initiative (2000-2003), the Government of Canada had a youth homelessness stream funded on an annual basis at \$26.5M. In the United States, the annual expenditure on youth homelessness is \$38M (in Canadian dollars and adjusted for population size).

The scope of a new Federal program to support community strategies to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness has been outlined above. The recent Federal budget (2016) provided increases of over \$50M to the Homeless Partnering Strategy over each of the next two years. This gives HPS some flexibility in considering new investments. We suggest a renewed and strategic investment of \$16.5M targeted to supporting communities to prevent and end youth homelessness. Funds will be used to directly support community strategic planning and program implementation. Overall project planning and coordination are also an important associated cost consideration. In order to identify the scope of the Federal investment to support this initiative, the different activities have been costed out (see Appendix A for details).

PROPOSED ANNUAL INVESTMENT IN ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS THROUGH THE HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

\$16.5 Million

For More Information, Contact



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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.



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A Way Home is a coalition of national organizations dedicated to preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness in Canada. Ending youth homelessness means doing things differently. A Way Home promotes effective strategies that shift the focus away from an emergency response to one of prevention. We also advocate for moving youth who do become homeless into supportive housing as rapidly as possible, in a safe and planned way. This can only be done through effective community planning, service integration, and the alignment of strategies and resources for maximum impact at the national, provincial, territorial, and community levels. Founding members include Raising the Roof, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Canadian Housing & Renewal Association, Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness.

Appendix A - Budget

	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
HPS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000
1. COMMUNITY PLANNING					
Coordination, administration & technical support	\$578,000	\$578,000	\$578,000	\$578,000	\$578,000
Evaluation	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
First ten communities	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000			
Second ten communities		\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		
Third ten communities			\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	
Fourth ten communities				\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
2. PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS					
Coordination, administration & technical support	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$450,000
Evaluation	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000
A) YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION					
i) School-based interventions	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
ii) Family first strategy	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
iii) Youth Reconnect	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
iv) Shelter Diversion through host home	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
v) Better transitions from child protection	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
vi) Discharge planning from corrections	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
B) HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE EXIT HOMELESSNESS					
i) Housing First for Youth	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000
ii) Employment training and support	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
iii) Mental health supports	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
iv) Reengagement with education	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
C) PREVENTION/REHOUSING INNOVATION FUND					
Program Funding	\$2,750,000	\$2,700,000	\$2,700,000	\$2,700,000	\$2,700,000
Evaluation	\$330,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000
3. SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH					
	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
4. KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT					
	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
5. FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL TABLE					
	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
TOTAL:	\$15,508,000	\$16,528,000	\$16,528,000	\$16,528,000	\$15,528,000

For details, contact the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness at thehub@edu.yorku.ca.

Notes

- i Gaetz, Stephen (2014) [Coming of Age: Reimagining our Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada](#). Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
Gaetz, Stephen (2014) [A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth](#). Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.
- ii United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2016). *The President's 2016 Budget: Fact Sheet on Homelessness Assistance*. Washington: Author. Retrieved from: <https://www.usich.gov/>
- iii ibid
- iv ibid
- v Seip, Nicolas. (2015, December 18). Congress Dedicates \$52.5 Million to Support Homeless Youth. True Colors Fund. Retrieved from: <https://truecolorsfund.org/2015/12/18/congress-dedicates-52-million-to-support-homeless-youth/>

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