



Calgary Homeless Foundation

Making Research Matter

Calgary's 3 Year Research Agenda
to End Homelessness
January 2009



Calgary
Homeless
Foundation



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following individuals for their guidance and thought leadership in developing the Research Agenda and input into the final draft.

Stephen Gaetz, Director of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network and Associate Dean of Education, York University.

George Coppus, Board Member, Calgary Homeless Foundation.

John Graham, Professor and Murray Fraser Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary.

Sharon Stroick, Research Social Planner, Social Policy and Planning, Community and Neighborhood Services, The City of Calgary.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation sincerely thanks the Calgary Chamber of Commerce for their support in hosting the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium.

In addition, we would like to recognize the efforts of the following volunteers who facilitated the small group discussions at the Symposium.

Jeff Halverson

Bill Hetherington

Madiha Khurshid

Barbara Schneider

Sharon Stroick

Deb Welliver

Lesley Washington

Joy Zerke

The Symposium Proceedings Report was prepared by Wendy Spragins, Consultant.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Poverty Reduction Coalition of the United Way of Calgary & Area, Alberta Lottery Fund, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada for their funding support for the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium as well as the development and dissemination of the Research Agenda.

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Letter from the Chief Strategy Officer

As the first Canadian city to develop and implement a 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary is at a critical juncture as it sets out in a bold, new direction. The Plan recognizes that “research matters”; in fact, one of its five core strategies is specifically focussed on improved data and systems knowledge. To be successful in this endeavour, our city needs the efforts of our research community.

Calgary is home to some of the country’s brightest researchers. Our city’s academic institutions, community-based agencies, government departments and the private sector have and continue to undertake significant research initiatives in the areas of affordable housing and homelessness. A coordinated and engaged research community can and should play a vital role in ending homelessness and lead the country in innovation.

This Research Agenda is the direct result of the efforts of community members engaged in various aspects of research in Calgary’s academic, non-profit, government and private sectors. We sincerely thank the participants of the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium and others who provided us with invaluable input to develop this Research Agenda.

This Research Agenda is the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing conversation—a critical feedback loop into the design and implementation of our 10 Year Plan, to ensure that we are directing our efforts and resources as effectively as possible. With your continued contribution, research will influence the future direction and implementation of the 10 Year Plan and ending homelessness in Calgary.

As you read through this document, we encourage you to consider how you can contribute to this collective effort. Can the research you are currently undertaking in this area answer some of the critical research questions posed here? If you are a funder of research, is there a way you could target your resources to support these research priorities? If you are a service provider, how can you both influence and be influenced by research in your work?

We also hope that the creation of a Calgary Homelessness Research Network can serve as a catalyst to bring researchers together from many walks of life to coordinate our efforts on this issue and foster multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral innovation in research. We strongly encourage you to become an active participant in the online hub, and network activities.

Many of us have been touched in some way by the issue of homelessness. Let’s not forget that behind every single research question we address in our work are real people who are homeless or are facing the prospect of homelessness. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that, as a research community, we work together, we seek the answers, and we target the same goal—to end homelessness in our great city.

Executive Summary

Making Research Matter

Calgary's 3 Year Research Agenda to End Homelessness

Background

As the first city in Canada to implement a 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary will lead the country in the collection, demonstration and dissemination of best practices in ending homelessness. The success of this bold initiative will be dependent on our ability to expand, co-ordinate and deepen our research capabilities so that we can gain a detailed understanding of homelessness in Calgary.

In order to make good evidence-based decisions, high-quality information is required—information that:

- Is relevant to policy makers.
- Is applicable to those on the frontline delivering services.
- Enhances our capacity to effectively improve and strengthen services.
- Strengthens the potential for bringing about an end to homelessness within the next ten years.

By creating a continuous feedback loop through research and evaluation, we can ensure we are on the right track. This will not only contribute to our capacity to establish best practices locally, but also build the case for interventions and cost efficiency, and enable us to clearly articulate outcomes.

The 10 Year Plan identified the importance of mobilizing Calgary's research community to create a shared Research Agenda to support the implementation of the Plan and enhance their capacity to implement priority research questions through the creation of a local Research Network.

Purpose of a Research Agenda and Research Network

A common Research Agenda and network will:

- Strategically coordinate research efforts towards ending homelessness and ensure research being undertaken is embedded in implementation efforts from the start.
- Help facilitate connections amongst researchers through enhanced coordination of existing research and work underway.
- Increase the engagement of academia (faculty and their students) in community efforts to address social issues.
- Increase opportunities for collaboration and innovation by promoting interdisciplinary and inter-sector research efforts.
- Address issues of research translation, particularly of moving research into practice, involving dialogue between researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders.
- Enhance Calgary's profile as a hub of excellence in research on homelessness.
- Promote sharing, exchange and mobilization of research within the region and beyond.

2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium

The Calgary Homeless Foundation initiated planning for the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium to obtain input from Calgary's research community towards the development and implementation of a 3 Year Research Agenda in support of the five key strategies underlying the 10 Year Plan, namely Prevention, Re-housing, Housing, Data and Research, and the Non-Profit Sector (see page 9 for an outline of the strategies). The Research Symposium was also envisioned as a catalyst event that would kick-start the formation of a Homelessness Research Network in Calgary as a vehicle for facilitating a coordinated effort in support of the Research Agenda.



Stephen Gaetz, Director of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network and Associate Dean of Education, York University, was the keynote speaker for the Symposium. Close to 50 participants from Calgary's academic institutions, community-based agencies, and the private sector were involved in this Research Symposium, as well as representatives from the municipal, provincial and federal governments and the Calgary Health Region. The Poverty Reduction Coalition of the United Way of Calgary & Area and the Calgary Chamber of Commerce graciously sponsored the event.

3 Year Research Priorities

The chart following outlines the Calgary Homeless Foundation's 3 Year Research Priorities that need to be addressed to inform the implementation of the 10 Year Plan, as well as the research areas of critical importance for immediate action in 2009.

The Priority Research Directions reflect the three predominant themes identified at the Homelessness Research Symposium, through reviews of pre-existing studies, internal analysis and consultations with research community stakeholders. These three priority research directions were relevant across all five strategies of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, but have particular significance for certain strategies as outlined on the chart on page 5. The research areas were proposed based on their direct relevance to the strategies, their relevance to Calgary and the achievability of the results in light of the Plan's ten year timeframe.

3 Year Research Priorities

3 Year Priority Research Directions	2009 Critical Research Areas	10 Year Plan Implementation Strategy Impact
<p>1. Ecology of Homelessness (or, population enumeration & composition)</p>	<p>1.a. Establish the minimum data set necessary for the implementation of a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) to capture real-time data on numbers of homeless persons, basic demographics, services accessed, outcomes, system capacity. Advise community structures how to sustain such data collection longitudinally.</p> <p>1.b. Assess the existing evidence regarding the link between socio-demographic traits associated with risk factors, causes, or pathways in/out of homelessness, as well as assets which prevent/reduce homelessness.</p> <p>1.c. Determine methods of assessing this data over time, to monitor overall trends of homelessness and associative factors contributing to it.</p>	<p>Strategy 2: Re-housing & Strategy 4: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention</p> <p>Strategy 2: Re-housing</p>
<p>2. Tailoring Interventions (or, implementing best results through the evaluation loop)</p>	<p>2.a. Based on review of the existing evidence, identify services, programs, and policy responses for different sub-groups of the homeless population.</p> <p>2.b. Determine methods of evaluating such programs and policy responses and of sustaining that monitoring process over time.</p> <p>2.c. Assess the role of such social supports as income assistance or short-term rental assistance in contributing to preventing homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships, and of sustaining this evaluation, longitudinally.</p> <p>2.d. Explore the relationship of mainstream social service systems including foster care, child welfare, corrections and mental health in pathways to/out of homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships, and of sustaining this evaluation, longitudinally.</p>	<p>Strategy 2: Re-housing & Strategy 3: Housing</p> <p>Strategy 4: Data & Research</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention</p> <p>Strategy 1: Prevention</p>
<p>3. System Co-ordination & Capacity (or, system barriers & facilitators)</p>	<p>3.a. Identify human resource, compensation & capacity issues facing agencies serving the homeless, actions needed vis-à-vis to shift towards ending homelessness, and determine sustained means of evaluating these issues.</p> <p>3.b. Assess flows through current housing stock & current levels of co-ordination among homeless serving agencies and how these processes can be evaluated longitudinally.</p> <p>3.c. Identify regulatory mechanisms to develop and maintain affordable housing.</p> <p>3.d. Establish “promising practices” for program and systems evaluation in ending homelessness and determine means of evaluating these practices, and of sustaining this evaluation over time.</p>	<p>Strategy 5: Non-Profit Sector</p> <p>Strategy 3: Housing</p> <p>Strategy 3: Housing</p> <p>Strategy 4: Housing Data & Research</p>

Implementing the Research Agenda

Throughout the Symposium sessions, a number of recommendations surfaced around research methodology and several key themes resonated across all of the discussions as guiding principles for implementing the Research Agenda:

Research Methodology

A variety of research methods were recommended for future studies including:

- Longitudinal studies.
- Multidisciplinary approaches.
- Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative).
- Economic, cost benefit analyses.
- Interventionist research.
- Ethnographic studies.
- Participatory action research.
- Evaluation studies.

Guiding Principles

A number of principles were identified by Symposium participants to guide the development and implementation of a research agenda and network:

1. The 10 Year Plan is a “living plan” to end homelessness.
2. Based on evidence.
3. With a feedback loop through ongoing evaluation.
4. Recognizing the uniqueness of Calgary, as well as the need to learn from other jurisdictions world-wide to improve local responses.
5. With research methods that follow the highest standards of academic rigour.
6. In a common language that everyone can understand.
7. To increase awareness and understanding.
8. By giving a voice to the homeless.



Creating a Calgary Homelessness Research Network

The Symposium provided the impetus for initiating the establishment of a local Homelessness Research Network. The value of having a network was enthusiastically endorsed as an effective vehicle for bringing together researchers from across sectors and linking their efforts around the implementation of a research agenda in support of the 10 Year Plan.

Collaboration, knowledge exchange, public engagement, research rigor, and workforce development were key principles that were highly valued by the Symposium participants.

The Calgary Homelessness Research Network is envisioned as a “Homelessness Hub” that:

1. Provides an on-line, publicly accessible one-stop shop where the latest information and research on homelessness, best practice, and ongoing and upcoming research initiatives could be found and shared.
2. Supports networking capacity that promotes and fosters tangible opportunities for local researchers and visiting experts to present their work, and frontline service efforts to be highlighted and shared.
3. Creates opportunities to partner within and between other networks—locally, provincially, nationally and globally—to share and leverage information and best practices.
4. Breaks down the barriers between researchers and research users, and helps get research into practice, enabling research to have a bigger impact on decision making and policy and program development.
5. Promotes only the most rigorous and highest standards of housing and homelessness research.

By initiating and supporting the development of a local Homelessness Research Network, the Foundation will have an effective vehicle for generating research, exchanging knowledge, promoting collaboration, fostering innovation and research excellence. The Research Network will be instrumental in creating the evidence, awareness and creative thinking required to solve the problem of homelessness over the next ten years. By placing research as a critical component of the planning model, Calgary has placed itself in a position of leadership. Through the example of our success, this important principle will be taken up by others, further strengthening the potential for ending homelessness.



Calgary Homeless Foundation Actions to Implement the Research Agenda

The Calgary Homeless Foundation will undertake a number of actions immediately to begin implementing the Research Agenda and support the creation of a local homelessness research network.

- 1. Launch an Online Homelessness Research HUB.** In collaboration with the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, the Calgary Homelessness Network will be the first local online research network to be launched under the umbrella of the national homelessness research clearing house, The Homeless Hub (www.homelesshub.ca), an initiative funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The official launch will occur during the Canadian Homelessness Conference in Calgary, February 2009.
- 2. Address the 2009 Critical Research Areas.** In order to address the Critical Research Areas, the Foundation will put forward calls for proposals from the research community, seek funding and partnerships to support research in these and other Priority Research Areas. The Calgary Homeless Foundation has already begun collaboration with members of the research community to address 2009 Critical Research Priorities.
- 3. Create Opportunities for Research Transfer.** The Calgary Homeless Foundation will create opportunities to foster research transfer by supporting the Calgary Homelessness Research Network members through the creation of opportunities for members to share research findings with each other and the larger community, particularly with the homelessness practice community. The Calgary Homeless Foundation will also create opportunities to partner other networks to share and leverage knowledge.
- 4. Promote a Common Research Agenda on Homelessness.** The Calgary Homeless Foundation will increase awareness of the Research Agenda to promote shared priorities for homelessness research locally, provincially and nationally, particularly to researchers and those who fund research, and in order to promote excellence in homelessness and housing research. It is our hope that members of the research community with an interest in the area of homelessness will look to the Research Agenda and consider how their work can contribute to addressing some of the pressing questions identified. In this manner, we can ensure that the work happening in academia, community, and private sector is leveraged and is directly relevant to the implementation of the 10 Year Plan. We also hope that by promoting the agenda to undergraduate and graduate students, we can attract their interest in this area for the duration of their studies and also as a potential career path after graduation.

Introduction

Since Calgary began counting in 1992, homelessness has risen more than 1,100 per cent to reach 4,060 in 2008 (City of Calgary, 2008). While the rate of homelessness has increased, so too has the severity. Between 1997 and 2002, the percentage of people who reported being homeless for over a year more than doubled. As many as 1,200 Calgarians are estimated to have been homeless for more than a year and more than 400 of them have been homeless for more than five years. As well, it is estimated that about half of the homeless people in Calgary have jobs but cannot afford to house themselves (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008).

In 2000, the United States National Alliance to End Homelessness issued a challenge to end homelessness in America within ten years. More than 300 communities have taken up this call to action and, encouraged and inspired by their success, the community-based Calgary Committee to End Homelessness was formed in January 2007 to spearhead efforts to address the crisis in Calgary. After a year of intensive research and public consultation, the Committee tabled Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness; a plan intended not to find new ways to manage or cope with the problems of homelessness, but to end it.

Homelessness cuts across many systems and research disciplines and, as such, necessitates an interdisciplinary, multi-method approach to solve. To co-ordinate the collaborative effort required to successfully implement Calgary's 10 Year Plan, a single point of accountability was needed. The Calgary Homeless Foundation was established in 1998 as a non-profit organization to provide capital funding and development assistance for housing projects. The Foundation has a leadership role around advocacy and communication on homelessness issues, and serves as a vehicle for community consultation on the problem and collaboration on solutions. The Calgary Homeless Foundation was recognized as being ideally placed to take on the oversight and responsibility for implementing the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, and was appointed to this role in January of 2008.

The vision of Calgary's 10 Year Plan is that by the year 2018 all people facing homelessness in Calgary will have access to safe, decent and affordable housing as well as the resources and supports necessary to sustain that housing. At the core of this initiative are five broad strategies:

- 1. Prevention.** Stop homelessness before it begins with effective prevention.
- 2. Re-Housing.** Re-house and provide the necessary support to Calgarians experiencing homelessness.
- 3. Housing.** Ensure adequate affordable housing, supportive housing and treatment capacity.
- 4. Data & Research.** Improve our data and systems knowledge.
- 5. Non-Profit Sector.** Reinforce non-profit organizations serving Calgarians experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Inherent to the successful realization of Calgary's 10 Year Plan is the need to expand, co-ordinate and deepen research capacity and focus research efforts on gaining a detailed understanding of homelessness in Calgary, as well as homeless systems and best practices. In order to make good evidence-based decisions, credible information will be required — information that is relevant to policy makers; applicable to those on the frontline delivering services; that enhances our capacity to effectively improve and strengthen services; and further strengthens the potential for bringing about an end to homelessness within the next ten years.

Purpose of a Calgary Homelessness Research Agenda and Network

Research and data are a critical component to the implementation of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. It is important that Calgary's research community continue to be engaged in coordinating efforts towards achieving the goals of the 10 Year Plan.

We know there are close to one hundred individuals in Calgary, and likely more, who are in some way involved in research activities focused on homelessness. Yet their efforts are disparate and are not merged into a clear direction. By bringing the research community together to identify key priorities to improve implementation of the Plan, we can leverage existing efforts to address a shared agenda.



Research can and should play a vital role in debates about solutions to homelessness by helping to educate the public, and providing solid evidence that informs policy and practice at all levels of government, as well as in the social, health care and housing sectors. Yet, there are considerable challenges to making this happen.

Although significant research and knowledge on homelessness has been produced by academics, service providers, community-based researchers and all levels of government, this body of research is extremely fragmented, difficult to access and not necessarily shared broadly amongst service providers, researchers and/or government.

We believe that by bringing together members of a multi-disciplinary and inter-sector research community to create an agenda of priority research questions, we can improve the connection between research, practice and policy.

A common research agenda and network will:

- Strategically coordinate research efforts towards ending homelessness and ensure research being undertaken is embedded in implementation efforts from the start.
- Help facilitate connections amongst researchers through enhanced coordination of existing research and work underway.
- Increase engagement of academic community (faculty and their students) in community efforts to address social issues.
- Increase opportunities for collaboration and innovation by promoting interdisciplinary and inter-sector research efforts.
- Address issues of research translation, particularly of research into practice, involving dialogue between researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders.
- Enhance Calgary's profile as a hub of excellence in research on homelessness.
- Promote sharing, exchange and mobilization of research within the region and beyond.

The development of Calgary Homelessness Research Network has clear intellectual, cultural, social and economic benefits. These benefits accrue not only to researchers, but to stakeholders involved in homelessness (either in government or the service sector). The community at large also benefits, as research on homelessness begins to have a greater impact on how people think about the issue, on decision making in government and by service providers. Ultimately, research knowledge contributes to bettering the lives of people who are currently, or who are at risk of becoming, homeless.

The implementation of a Calgary Homelessness Research Agenda and Research Network will:

- 1. Increase cross-sector collaboration.** The Calgary Homelessness Research Network will help break down the silos to interdisciplinary work. Further, it aims to create opportunities for collaboration between academic and community-based stakeholders.
- 2. Enhance knowledge exchange.** By linking with the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, local research efforts will be able to share knowledge and contribute to regional and national homelessness efforts. The expansion of the research network provincially will be pursued particularly within the Seven Cities group.
- 3. Increase understanding of homelessness in Calgary.** Mobilizing research knowledge will lead to a more educated public, supported by knowledge dissemination efforts. High profile events will draw media attention to the issue of homelessness and provide opportunities to influence public opinion based on solid research evidence.
- 4. Enable better decision-making by government and agencies.** By increasing the links between evidence and policy making and interventions, more appropriate, cost-effective solutions will be implemented based on research of the highest standards.
- 5. Increase innovation and excellence in new research.** New knowledge partnerships that emerge out of the work of the Homelessness Research Network will result in increased research capacity in a variety of disciplines. By promoting the most rigorous and highest standards of housing and homelessness research, the Network will have a significant impact on the quality of evidence used for planning, intervention and theory building. Also, by engaging non-traditional faculties and disciplines in homelessness research, cross-fertilization will contribute to innovation.
- 6. Increase student engagement in homelessness research.** Through the activities of the Network and promotion of the Research Agenda, homelessness will be promoted as a research area to nurture a new generation of scholars at the undergraduate and graduate level.
- 7. Improve knowledge translation into homeless serving agencies.** Knowledge sharing, networking and training opportunities will allow community members to more effectively use research, and to engage in research that addresses issues identified locally as important.
- 8. Enhance profile of Calgary as a hub of excellence in research on homelessness.** The network, and outcomes of its Calgary-based activities, will have a broader audience. Further, researchers, media, social service agencies and the general public will have streamlined access to quality locally relevant and interdisciplinary research.



2008 Research Symposium Proceedings

The Foundation initiated planning for the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium to obtain insight and knowledge from Calgary's research community towards the development and implementation of a 3 Year Research Agenda in support of the five key strategies underlying the 10 Year Plan. The Research Symposium was also envisioned as a catalyst event that would kick-start the formation of a Homelessness Research Network in Calgary as a vehicle for facilitating a co-ordinated effort in support of the Research Agenda.

In preparation for the Symposium, the Calgary Homeless Foundation gathered information on the research gaps that needed to be addressed to support the five key strategies. Priority research questions were developed based on information from pre-existing studies (c.f. City of Calgary 2007a, 2007b), internal analysis and consultations with research community stakeholders. The questions were proposed based on their direct relevance to the strategies, their relevance to Calgary and the achievability of the results, in light of the Plan's ten year timeframe.



The Calgary Homeless Foundation then invited key members of the local research community and other interested stakeholders to the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium. These parties were asked to provide feedback on the proposed priority research questions and endorse priority research directions to address the research needs of Calgary's 10 Year Plan. In addition, participants also discussed the potential of creating a local homelessness research network. Close to 50 participants from Calgary's academic institutions, community-based agencies, and the private sector were involved in this Research Symposium, together with representatives from the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. There was strong representation from the non-profit sector, the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, the University of Calgary and The City of Calgary. In addition, representatives from the Calgary Health Region and Calgary Economic

Development participated.

The agenda for the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium was organized around the five key strategies of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Participants were divided into working groups for sessions on prevention, re-housing, housing, data and research, and the non-profit sector.

A number of key themes resonated across all of the discussions at the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium, providing an underlying structure to the day:

1. The 10 Year Plan is a “living plan” to end homelessness. Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness holds great value as a “living plan”. Research and outcome-based evaluation has been hardwired directly into the Plan, and this will ensure a much better understanding of the issues involved, and a more effective and coordinated effort towards addressing them. Research will facilitate the implementation of the 10 Year Plan as it is implemented and, in so doing, shape its direction. This will contribute to moving it forward in a positive, relevant, evidence-based manner. By remaining open, respectful and responsive to the different kinds of knowledge generated through this collaborative effort, the Calgary Homeless Foundation will ensure the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness remains meaningful and true to its inherent value as a “living plan”.

- 2. Based on evidence.** Discussions at the Symposium emphasized the need for more evidence-based research on all issues related to homelessness, particularly the need for more longitudinal data. A process and system of research is required that would allow for the collection and sharing of data across time and across systems, so that we can get a better understanding of the homeless situation in Calgary and beyond, as well as a clearer picture of our homelessness systems and best practices.
- 3. With a feedback loop through ongoing evaluation.** Ongoing evaluation is critical to ensuring the success of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Evaluation procedures have been built directly into the Plan's implementation process and evaluation should continue to be an integral and ongoing part of any implementation initiative.
- 4. Recognizing the uniqueness of Calgary.** Recognizing and understanding the uniqueness of Calgary's homeless situation is important to ensuring the successful implementation of the 10 Year Plan. At a national level, there are many commonalities, but at a local level, the economics of the situation are unique and the issues need to be addressed through a more targeted research approach.
- 5. With research methods that follow the highest standards of academic rigour.** For research findings to be credible and withstand scrutiny from a variety of source, it is critical that the body of evidence is built using the highest standards of academic rigor. This includes adhering the highest standard of ethics protocol for research involving humans.
- 6. In a common language that everyone can understand.** Another key theme within discussions at the Symposium was the overall ability or, more accurately, inability to adequately and correctly identify the number of individuals and families who are homeless, and the unique needs of "sub-populations" within the homeless community. In particular, we do not have a good understanding of those persons who are at risk of homelessness. This was not just a "numbers" issue. The terminology used to identify the homeless, especially the "sub-populations" of homeless, does not adequately address the unique needs of the community and impedes our ability to develop effective programming.
- The lack of a common understanding around what is meant by "research" was another issue highlighted in conversations at the Symposium. There is a need for more inclusivity, not less. Research, at all different levels, in a variety of designs and formats, produced in a language everyone can understand was considered essential to the successful implementation of the 10 Year Plan.
- A clearer definition of all of our terms of reference is necessary in order to bring the broader community into this conversation.
- 7. To increase awareness and understanding.** In order to move the agenda forward in support of the successful implementation of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, we will need to broaden awareness and understanding of the problem. Symposium discussions highlighted a lack of information and understanding of homelessness in the public arena, and a lack of adequate knowledge and training in the homeless service sector and other mainstream systems dealing with the homeless community.

8. By giving a voice to the homeless. The need to give a voice to those impacted by homelessness was a strong, recurrent theme at the Symposium. Our research efforts will need to be inclusive if we wish to achieve a clear understanding of what the homeless community wants or needs; what they think works well; and what they choose to access and why. The homeless population's use of services can differ from agency goals and there can be many complicated, underlying issues at play. In order to successfully solve the problem, we will need to get an accurate picture from all points of view.

These guiding principles provided an underlying context for the day's discussions around the development and implementation of a 3 Year Research Agenda and the formation of a local Homelessness Research Network in support of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Research Methodology

Throughout the Symposium sessions on the development and implementation of a research agenda in support of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, a number of recommendations surfaced around research methodology. A key theme throughout these conversations was how research was not only vital to the Plan, but needed to matter. Creating an evidence base relevant to policy makers, the people on the frontline delivering services and the homeless community itself was considered key to the successful implementation of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Methods adhering to the highest standards of rigour are necessary to ensure the validity and credibility of research.



Discussions centred on the need for longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative data; economic, cost benefit analyses; and the use of interventionist, ethnographic and participatory action research approaches. Throughout all of the discussions, the importance of evaluation was continuously emphasized.

Symposium participants stressed the importance of multi-disciplinary research throughout the proceedings of the day. Disciplines such as Medicine, Community Health, Education, the Social Sciences, Nursing, Communications & Culture, Environmental Design and Policy Studies were named as critical to gaining a deeper understanding of the issue. Groups identified the potential role of disciplines which do not traditionally engage in homelessness research, such as Engineering.

Not only was "Making Research Matter" the title of the opening keynote address to the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium, it was clearly evident that it was a strong underlying theme throughout the day's sessions.

3 Year Research Priorities

This section outlines the major priorities for research exploration identified as essential to promoting the implementation of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. These priorities specify the most challenging and at the same time most promising directions for policy-related research in support of the Plan. They are aimed at assisting policy makers and researchers in targeting limited available resources towards the greatest research needs, and potentially, most fruitful outcomes. These priorities reflect the overarching themes of the priority research questions identified by Symposium participants, Calgary Homeless Foundation's internal analysis, and reviews of existing literature.

The priorities are relevant across all five implementation strategies of the 10 Year Plan and reflect three major cross-cutting research themes: the ecology of homelessness (or population enumeration and composition); tailoring interventions (or implementing best results through the evaluation loop); and system co-ordination and capacity (or system barriers and facilitators).

The chart on page 16 outlines the top research questions identified by Symposium participants. The remainder of this section provides detailed explication of the three predominant themes within the research priorities, and outlines specific research questions within these three research priorities.

Top Research Questions Identified by Symposium Participants

Overarching Themes:

1. Ecology of Homelessness (or, population enumeration & composition)
2. Tailoring Interventions (or, implementing best results through the evaluation loop)
3. System Co-ordination & Capacity (or, system barriers & facilitators)

Strategy 1: Prevention

Stop homelessness before it begins with effective prevention.

Priority Research Questions:

1. Do we have adequate understanding of the number of individuals and families at risk of homelessness and the unique needs of “sub-populations”?
2. What are the most effective and accessible approaches to prevention for at risk and homeless individuals and families? What is the experience of the client in the system of services?
3. What is the role of the “system(s)” such as foster care, corrections and health in contributing to and ending homelessness?

Strategy 2: Re-housing

Re-house and provide the necessary support to Calgarians experiencing homelessness.

Priority Research Questions:

1. Do the people who get into housing see this as only one step along the way? How does their vision for their lives differ from, or mesh with, our version of what their lives should be like? Should we also be doing research into the role and organization of employment as a key component of an ongoing life?
2. What do service recipients say about what they want? What does a full continuum of housing and supports look like from their perspective?
3. Is there a moral element in our thinking that constrains our ability to imagine alternatives and to listen carefully to people?

Strategy 3: Housing

Ensure adequate affordable housing, supportive housing and treatment capacity.

Priority Research Questions:

1. How does the location of affordable housing and housing mix impact outcomes of re-housed individuals and families and Calgary as a whole? How does this differ for sub-populations?
2. What are the particular housing needs of sub-populations?
3. What are the most effective regulatory mechanisms to develop and maintain affordable housing?

Strategy 4: Data and Research

Improve our data and systems knowledge.

Priority Research Questions:

1. How do best create and implement a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in Calgary?
2. How do we capture hidden homeless and identify their particular needs? How do we prevent people from moving into that situation?
3. What can we learn by examining the issue of homelessness historically? What has occurred to get us to this point and how can we avoid it in the future?

Strategy 5: The Non-Profit Sector

Reinforce non-profit organizations serving Calgarians experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Priority Research Questions:

1. What are the human resource issues facing agencies serving the homeless and the specific actions needed to address them? What is the role and impact of benefits and compensation in retention and quality of service delivery for homeless serving agencies?
2. How prepared are staff in agencies serving the homeless? How does inadequate training complicate agency objectives? What impact does training have on staff recruitment, retention and promotion? What are the capacity building needs of the sector to shift its work towards ending homelessness? What professional development opportunities exist to enhance sector capacity to meet the needs of homeless populations, and to promote innovation and retention?
3. What is the current level of coordination among homeless serving agencies? How can access for those who are homeless or at risk be better streamlined?

Research Priority 1 The Ecology of Homelessness

Well known U.S. homelessness researchers Dennis Culhane and Stephen Metraux noted that:

Perhaps no other research issues have consumed more resources or engendered greater debate than those that address the most basic policy and planning questions in this field: How many people experience homelessness, and what are their characteristics? (Culhane & Metraux, 1997, p. 342).

In Calgary's case, as in most Canadian municipalities, point-in-time methods are the predominant means of enumerating and describing the homeless population. City of Calgary Biennial Homeless Counts since the early 1990s have provided valuable longitudinal data on the magnitude and demographics of the population. These snapshots provide useful, but very basic data which has limited value given the demands of public policy and planning. More extensive analyses, such as the 2002 Calgary Homeless Study, provide us with details related to demographics, patterns of service use, housing situation, individual histories and interaction with mainstream systems. However, such studies are sporadic and therefore limited in analyses of longitudinal patterns.

The creation of a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to track basic information about persons experiencing homelessness will be integral to Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. This electronic database system will record individual-level information on an ongoing basis about all homeless persons accessing services through local providers. The HMIS can capture real-time data on numbers of homeless persons, basic demographics, services accessed and outcomes. It can also capture system capacity and provide a powerful tool for streamlining client access to supports.

Through the implementation of the HMIS, all five strategies would have better information about the flow of persons through homeless serving agencies and mainstream systems of care. Based on longitudinal HMIS data, prevalence rates by age, ethnicity, and secondary and corresponding relative risk for shelter admission can be calculated, as well as predictors for length of shelter stay, repeat shelter use or housing outcomes. Data can also point to the effectiveness of past or proposed homeless policies on shelter utilization rates or service use patterns of sub-populations. This information can contribute to a better understanding of client needs, improved system co-ordination and increased understanding about the impact of interventions (United States Government & Culhane 2004, Culhane & Metraux 1997).

The HMIS will collect information about homeless persons who are service users, and has the potential to capture the relative homeless based on their contact with the service system. We will still need to develop a systematic way of assessing needs and characteristics of those who do not use shelters or supports regularly.

During discussions at the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium, the creation of a Homeless Management Information System was considered the highest priority and several key research questions were identified to move us towards this goal:

- What data related to homeless persons is currently being collected and by whom?
- What is the minimum data set that needs to be captured through the HMIS?
- How can current data collection systems be modified or integrated into a coordinated HMIS, or is there a need for a new system?
- What are the legal implications of implementing a HMIS?

- How would the HMIS be implemented “on the ground”? What are the HMIS’ priority points of intersection with the homeless population (i.e. outreach, shelters, Emergency Medical Services [EMS], the Calgary Police Service [CPS])?
- What are the resource implications of implementing the HMIS and the capacity building needs for participants?
- Based on data derived from the HMIS, can a model be developed to illustrate the flow of various sub-groups through the homeless serving systems and how they interact with hospitals, EMS, CPS, etc.? Can the model capture the impact of various interventions of this flow?
- How can the HMIS be tailored to capture the relative or hidden homeless population?



- How can the HMIS help increase our understanding of the circumstances and needs of specific sub-populations (for example, aboriginals, street youth, women, families, new Canadians, etc.)
- How can information about homeless persons, who do not use services and would be inadequately captured by the HMIS, be best collected? What should data collection capture?

While local research examining the nature of the visible homeless population, or the “chronic homeless”, exists, we know relatively little about the scope of the population at risk for homelessness. Through census data we have such basic demographic information as tenure, age, presence of disability, and ethnicity. As we move forward with the implementation of Calgary’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, however, a much more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the at risk population and its particular needs is required, as reflected in the following questions of interest:

- What characteristics or immediate circumstances distinguish an individual or family likely to become homeless from the remaining at risk population?
- What are the particular characteristics and circumstances of those at risk for chronic homelessness?
- What are the characteristics and circumstances of people who were homeless one time, episodically or chronically and exited this situation, from those who remained homeless?

Research Priority 2 Tailoring Interventions

While we understand the importance of adequate income, appropriate and affordable housing, and supports for people to enable them to maintain housing, there is a need for more in-depth research to build the evidence base around effective prevention strategies. How strategies should be tailored for particular sub-populations is also an important area for further study. Ways of prioritizing the population at risk for homelessness, and tailoring interventions appropriately, need to be developed along with a better understanding of how prevention supports should be delivered. Again, several key questions need considering:

- What mix of housing assistance and services prevents homelessness for individuals and families most effectively?
- What are the cost implications of these options?
- How should such prevention efforts be tailored for particular sub-groups?
- How should prevention programs identify at risk individuals and families and target limited prevention services to them?
- What is the role of income assistance or short-term rental assistance in preventing homelessness?

To be effective, re-housing approaches will need to be built on a strong evidence base of what works from outreach to re-housing and beyond. An HMIS will provide us with an excellent source of information about service users, and targeted interventions tailored for particular client needs can be developed based on this knowledge. We will need to develop a systematic way of assessing the characteristics and needs of those who do not use shelters or supports, in order to tailor re-housing supports for them. We need to consider the following:

- Which re-housing and services interventions are most effective for which groups of homeless people?
- To what extent are rapid exit/re-housing programs effective and for whom?
- How does housing fit into norms of street culture? What are the impacts of informal organization systems on housing outcomes? How can informal networks enhance re-housing efforts?
- How are health and mental health services best delivered to homeless individuals with differing characteristics and needs?
- What are the outcomes and cost implications of differing models of care delivery?

A key goal of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, and an underpinning to the "Housing First" approach, is that homeless persons should have access to appropriate permanent housing with supports. We need to understand what the housing and supports look like from a homeless person's perspective, and our re-housing and housing interventions should make a concerted effort to incorporate these perspectives into the design of programs.

Some research does exist on affordable housing practices and their cost-effectiveness, but there is a need for evaluation and cost benefit analyses to help us determine how best to maximize impact. We also need to examine the impact of housing location and mix in relation to re-housing efforts, particularly in those jurisdictions that have implemented 10 Year Plans. More evaluation of housing characteristics is also needed to determine what works best for prevention and re-housing.

The following should be considered:

- What are the criteria to identify the most appropriate locations for affordable housing in Calgary? How would these be identified and accessed most effectively?
- How does the location of affordable housing and housing mix impact housing outcomes of re-housed individuals and families, and Calgary as a whole? How does this differ for sub-populations?
- Which groups should affordable housing units target for most impact in ending homelessness? How can limited resources be concentrated for best results?
- What are the impacts, and associated costs, on housing stability and satisfaction of housing characteristics such as: scattered-site vs. project-based settings, shared vs. individual housing; and tenant-held leases vs. provider-held leases?
- What is the range of case management support needed to re-house various sub-populations?
- How do low barrier program outcomes differ from those of structured programs?
- What role should transitional housing play? Is transitional housing cost-effective compared with other approaches to achieving these objectives?
- Who is homeownership ready? What are the supports needed for them to obtain and maintain housing?

We will also need to understand:

- What do re-housed persons see as necessary to their self-fulfillment? Is permanent housing a first step? How important is meaningful employment, education, family re-unification, etc.?
- What do service recipients say about what they want? How does a full continuum of housing and supports look like from the client perspective?
- What is the experience of the client in the current system of services?

Ongoing evaluation will be a key component of the successful implementation of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. We need to strengthen the evidence base around evaluation by investigating the following specific topic areas:

- What are the "best practices" for program and systems evaluation in ending homelessness?
- What are the outcomes and measures at the individual, community, and systems level we need to achieve to move us towards the goal of ending homelessness?
- How do we measure performance towards ending homelessness at the individual, community and system level? What is the necessary data to achieve this measurement?
- Based on evaluation metrics, how do we determine what qualifies as "best" or "promising" practices?

Research Priority 3 System Co-ordination and Capacity

While traditional understandings of homelessness focus on the role of the individual, his or her personal shortcomings and/or decisions leading to the housing outcome, we have to shift our focus to the role of structures in preventing or exacerbating risk. We must identify policy changes or policy implementation practices that decrease or increase the risk for homelessness at both a local and a national level. We need a much better understanding of how we got into this current crisis if we wish to avert it in the future.

- What is the scope and characteristics of discharges from mainstream systems, including foster care, child welfare, corrections and mental health systems?
- What systems contribute to homelessness? Which contribute to preventing homelessness?
- To what extent do discharge planning models for reintegration from various systems effectively prevent homelessness?
- What level of housing and services should be attached to discharge planning?

To facilitate better flow and access to housing, we need to determine what barriers currently exist to accessing affordable housing, and what the most effective regulatory and tax mechanisms are to develop and maintain affordable housing. Research is needed that investigates the current level of co-ordination and capacity within and across the homelessness sector and mainstream systems of care related to all five implementation strategies so that we can streamline and improve our services. Again, a better understanding of the system is required from the perspective of the people who rely on it, and the people who work within it.

- What are the most effective regulatory mechanisms to develop and maintain affordable housing?
- What mechanisms should be employed to stimulate the creation of rental stock?
- How can the private sector be more engaged in building and operating affordable housing?
- What are the barriers to accessing current affordable housing stock? What are the key ways to facilitate better flow and access to these units? What are the admission criteria?
- What is the current level of co-ordination among homeless serving agencies?
- What is the impact of a citywide, common, but physically distributed intake and assessment process compared to our current dispersed model?

Agencies serving the homeless community are faced with many human resource issues that prevent us from building the capacity we need within the homeless serving sector to successfully implement Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Wages, benefits and working conditions are of particular concern here in Calgary where a sense of urgency exists around our capacity to retain agency and system staff within our current economic climate.

As well, we need to ensure that frontline providers are able to access the information, knowledge and training (both pre-service and continuing education) they need to do the work they are mandated to do. We need to strengthen our evidence base around all of these critical human resource issues. More knowledge is required around the people who work with the homeless; what training they do have, experiential or otherwise; and what further education or training do they feel would enhance their capacity to meet the needs of the homeless community.

- What are the human resource issues facing agencies serving the homeless?
- What are the specific actions needed to address these issues?
- What is the role of benefits and pay in retention and quality of service delivery for impact in homeless serving agencies?
- How well prepared are staff in agencies serving the homeless? How does inadequate training complicate agency objectives?
- What impact does training have on staff recruitment, retention and promotion?
- What are the capacity building needs of the sector to shift its work towards ending homelessness?
- What professional development opportunities are available for people in this sector, as well as other service sectors, to enhance their capacity to meet the needs of homeless populations, and to promote innovation and retention?
- What is the current level of coordination among homeless serving agencies? How can access be better streamlined?

2009 Research Priorities

Based on the aforementioned research priorities and corresponding research questions, the Calgary Homeless Foundation has prioritized the following research areas for 2009. Prioritization was driven by the most critical research needs identified to support the implementation of the five strategies of the 10 Year Plan. The chart below outlines the 2009 research areas of highest priority for the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the particular 10 Year Plan Implementation Strategies they most directly impact.

3 Year Research Priorities		
3 Year Priority Research Directions	2009 Critical Research Areas	10 Year Plan Implementation Strategy Impact
1. Ecology of Homelessness (or, population enumeration & composition)	1.a. Establish the minimum data set necessary for the implementation of a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) to capture real-time data on numbers of homeless persons, basic demographics, services accessed, outcomes, system capacity. Advise community structures how to sustain such data collection longitudinally.	Strategy 2: Re-housing & Strategy 4: Data & Research
	1.b. Assess the existing evidence regarding the link between socio-demographic traits associated with risk factors, causes, or pathways in/out of homelessness, as well as assets which prevent/reduce homelessness.	Strategy 1: Prevention
	1.c. Determine methods of assessing this data over time, to monitor overall trends of homelessness and associative factors contributing to it.	Strategy 2: Re-housing
2. Tailoring Interventions (or, implementing best results through the evaluation loop)	2.a. Based on review of the existing evidence, identify services, programs, and policy responses for different sub-groups of the homeless population.	Strategy 2: Re-housing & Strategy 3: Housing
	2.b. Determine methods of evaluating such programs and policy responses and of sustaining that monitoring process over time.	Strategy 4: Data & Research
	2.c. Assess the role of such social supports as income assistance or short-term rental assistance in contributing to preventing homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships, and of sustaining this evaluation, longitudinally.	Strategy 1: Prevention
	2.d. Explore the relationship of mainstream social service systems including foster care, child welfare, corrections and mental health in pathways to/out of homelessness; and determine means of evaluating these relationships, and of sustaining this evaluation, longitudinally.	Strategy 1: Prevention
3. System Co-ordination & Capacity (or, system barriers & facilitators)	3.a. Identify human resource, compensation & capacity issues facing agencies serving the homeless, actions needed vis-à-vis to shift towards ending homelessness, and determine sustained means of evaluating these issues.	Strategy 5: Non-Profit Sector
	3.b. Assess flows through current housing stock & current levels of co-ordination among homeless serving agencies and how these processes can be evaluated longitudinally.	Strategy 3: Housing
	3.c. Identify regulatory mechanisms to develop and maintain affordable housing.	Strategy 3: Housing
	3.d. Establish "promising practices" for program and systems evaluation in ending homelessness and determine means of evaluating these practices, and of sustaining this evaluation over time.	Strategy 4: Housing Data & Research

Creating a Calgary Homelessness Research Network

As the first city in Canada to initiate a 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary has placed itself in a leadership role in its effort to collect, demonstrate and disseminate best practices to end homelessness. The success of this initiative will be dependent on our ability to expand, co-ordinate and deepen our research capabilities so that we can gain a detailed understanding of homelessness in Calgary. By incorporating the principles of research and evaluation directly into the process, we will be able maintain the value of the 10 Year Plan as a “living document”, an initiative that moves us forward in a collaborative, positive, relevant and evidence-based way.

Not only was the 2008 Calgary Homelessness Research Symposium a success in advancing the development and implementation of a Research Agenda for the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, it provided the impetus for initiating the establishment of a local Homelessness Research Network. The value of having a network was enthusiastically endorsed as an effective vehicle for bringing together researchers from across sectors and linking their efforts around the implementation of a Research Agenda in support of the 10 Year Plan.

The Calgary Homelessness Research Network was envisioned as a “Homeless Hub”, an on-line, publicly accessible one-stop shop where the latest information on homelessness, best practice, and ongoing and upcoming research initiatives could be found and shared. The network would promote and foster tangible opportunities for local researchers and visiting experts to present their work, and frontline service efforts to be highlighted and shared. It would also provide us with opportunities to partner within and between other networks — locally, provincially, nationally and globally — to share and leverage information and best practice.

Collaboration, knowledge exchange, public engagement, research rigor, and workforce development were five key principles that were highly valued by the participants at the 2008 Homelessness Research Symposium. By strengthening efforts within these areas of interest, the Calgary Homeless Foundation will be able to maximize the potential for successfully implementing the 10 Year Plan.

Knowledge transfer goes beyond the concepts of dissemination or diffusions. As A.M. Schreyer-Roy suggests,

“It is an ongoing and iterative process and strategy that requires the active and conscious participation of both researchers and research-users, and is based on the basic principles of integration and simplification” (2005, Online).

By initiating and supporting the development of a local Homelessness Research Network, the Foundation will have an effective vehicle for generating research and exchanging knowledge; and for promoting collaboration and fostering innovation. The Research Network will be instrumental in developing the evidence, awareness and creative thinking required to solve the problem of homelessness over the next ten years.

Calgary’s Homelessness Research Network will be an effective tool for getting research into practice by helping to break down the barriers between researchers and research users, and enabling research to have a bigger impact on decision-making and policy and program development. By making research a critical component of the planning model, Calgary has placed itself in a position of leadership. Through the example of our success, this important principle will be taken up by others, further strengthening the potential for ending homelessness.

Immediate Actions

The Calgary Homeless Foundation will undertake a number of actions immediately to begin implementing the Research Agenda and support the creation of a local Homelessness Research Network.

In collaboration with the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, the Calgary Homelessness HUB will be the first local online research network to be launched under the umbrella of the SSHRC funded national homelessness research clearing house, The Homeless Hub (www.homelesshub.ca). The official launch will occur during the Canadian Homelessness Conference in Calgary, February 2009.

In order to address the Critical Research Areas, the Foundation will put forward calls for proposals from the research community, seek funding and partnerships to support research in these and other Priority Research Areas. The Calgary Homeless Foundation has already begun collaboration with members of the research community to address 2009 Critical Research Priorities.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation will create opportunities to foster research transfer by supporting the Calgary Homelessness Research Network members through the creation of events and opportunities for members to share research findings with each other and the larger community, particularly with the homelessness practice community. The Foundation will also create opportunities to partner other networks to share and leverage knowledge.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation will increase research awareness of the Research Agenda to promote shared priorities for homelessness research locally, provincially and nationally, particularly to researchers and those who fund research.

It is our hope that members of the research community, with interest in the area of homelessness, will look to the Research Agenda to ensure their work will answer some of the pressing questions identified. In this manner, we can ensure the work happening in academia, community, and private sector is leveraged and is directly relevant to the implementation of the 10 Year Plan.

Graduate and undergraduate students were identified as a key resource for the successful implementation of the Research Agenda. We hope that by promoting the agenda to this group, we can both attract their interest in this area for the duration of their studies, but also as a potential career path after graduation.



Conclusion

Homelessness is a national issue that has reached crisis proportions. A coordinated, practical, and targeted approach is required to solve it. As the first city in Canada to adopt a 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, Calgary is at the forefront of an innovative and interdisciplinary effort to help solve this crisis. The rest of the country will be looking at the work being done here with great interest.



Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness will be realized through action plans addressing five broad strategies: prevention, re-housing, housing, data and research, and the non-profit sector. The 2008 Homelessness Research Symposium brought together close to 50 key members of the local research community and engaged them in working towards the development and implementation of a 3 Year Research Agenda in support of these strategies. The Symposium participants also endorsed the formation of a Calgary Homelessness Research Network as a vehicle for coordinating and strengthening this effort.

Based on the insights and recommendations provided at the 2008 Homelessness Research Symposium, the Calgary Homeless Foundation will begin its work to implement a 3 Year Research Agenda in partnership with interested stakeholders.

Contact

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Glossary of Terms

The following definitions have been collated from a number of sources and are intended as a guideline only. As Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness is implemented, and our evidence base is expanded, we may wish to re-define our terms of reference to adequately reflect local conditions.

Absolute homeless – A United Nations classification of individuals living in the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters.

Affordable housing – A housing opportunity that can be achieved by a household whose gross income is less than 65 per cent of area median income, spending no more than 30 per cent of that gross income on rent or a mortgage. This housing opportunity should also be safe, of decent quality and accessible.

At risk for homelessness – On the edge of becoming homeless, often because of extremely low incomes and having to pay a large percent of the adjusted gross household income for housing expenses.

Case management – A collaborative process that assesses, plans, implements, co-ordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet a client's health, human service and housing needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and resource management and promotes quality and cost-effective interventions and outcomes.

Chronic homeless – A person or family is considered chronically homeless if they have been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.

Episode of homelessness – A separate, distinct and sustained stay on the streets and/or in a homeless emergency shelter.

Episodic homeless – An individual or family who is homeless for a short period of time and moves in and out of the shelter system four or five times over the course of a three-year period.

Hidden homeless – Persons who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return if they so choose but may be "couch surfing" (i.e., staying with friends or family), sleeping in vehicles or abandoned buildings, camping, etc. (i.e., a homeless person who is not visible on the night of a homeless person count).

Housing First – Housing First refers to programs that place homeless people directly into permanent housing without the requirement for a transition period. While support services are offered and made readily available, the program does not require participation in these services to remain in the housing. Once in housing, a low demand approach accommodates a client suffering from alcohol and substance use, so that "relapse" will not result in the client losing housing. Housing First programs have a continued effort to provide case management and to hold housing for clients, even if they leave their program housing for short periods.

Inadequately housed – People living in temporary or non-conventional structures, in unfit housing, or in extreme overcrowding.

Insecurely housed – People living in insecure accommodation, under threat of eviction, or under threat of violence.

Relative homeless – United Nations classification of people living in spaces that do not meet the basic health and safety standards including protection from the elements; access to safe water and sanitation; security of tenure and personal safety; affordability; access to employment, education and health care; and the provision of minimum space to avoid overcrowding.

Supported housing – Supported housing refers to regular housing with supports that are not linked to the housing itself.

Supportive housing – Supportive housing is multi-unit housing largely occupied by tenants who require support services that are linked to the housing.

Transitional housing – A housing project that has as its purpose facilitating the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing within a reasonable amount of time.

Transient homeless – For the purposes of Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, a person is considered to be transient homeless if he/she is homeless for less than a year and has fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

List of Participating Organizations

Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness	City of Calgary
Calgary Chamber of Commerce	McMan Youth, Family & Community Services
Calgary Drop-In Centre	Mount Royal College
Calgary Economic Development	Poverty Reduction Coalition
Calgary Health Region	Service Canada
Calgary Herald	SHARP Foundation
Calgary Homeless Foundation	United Way of Calgary & Area
Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers	University of Calgary
Calgary Urban Project Society	Vibrant Communities Calgary
Canadian Homelessness Research Network	Woods Homes
Canadian Mental Health Association	

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