

Environmental Scan Related to First Nations Homelessness

Assembly of First Nations



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Executive Summary

This document presents an environmental scan of issues, trends and data related to First Nations homelessness, and is one of three projects being simultaneously conducted by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to inform an “Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off Reserve”.

The environmental scan involved:

- A review of Census data and other Statistics Canada information.
- A review of Point-in-Time Homelessness Count and national shelter utilization data to provide baseline information on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness.
- A systematic review of federal department websites and reports to record where programs and services exist, and where they do not, and to identify relevant data.
- A systematic review of provincial programs through websites and reports.
- An Internet search of grey literature, primarily focusing on services informed by First Nations perspectives.

A key challenge in conducting the research for the environmental scan is that much of the data groups First Nations with other Indigenous population groups together and simply refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people as “Indigenous peoples”. Whenever possible, the environmental scan provides information specific to First Nations, but much of the data and research on best practices applies more broadly to Indigenous people. Distinct perspectives and experiences of First Nations people may be obscured because of this, and systemic issues specific to First Nations may be missed, which may limit the production of effective policy or interventions to address First Nations homelessness.

Findings

The findings from the environmental scan can be summarized into the following five points:

1. There is no definition of homelessness specific to First Nations people.

- No First Nations-specific definition of homelessness was found in grey literature. The definitions identified were all pan-Indigenous.
- Jessie Thistle, a Métis-Cree author and historian, has prepared a widely cited and adopted definition of Indigenous homelessness. Thistle’s definition frames Indigenous homelessness through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews as a breakdown of healthy relationships with self, family, community, land, water, place, animals, culture and language resultant from colonial disruptions. This emphasizes a holistic concept of “home” and contrasts with standard definitions of homelessness, which focus on housing precarity or lack of habitation structure.

2. There are a number of factors contributing to First Nations homelessness.

- Colonization and ongoing marginalization of First Nations people are widely recognized as the primary causes of First Nations homelessness. Colonial policies and practices have resulted in disparities between First Nations populations and non-Indigenous people in many areas of life that contribute to contemporary experiences of First Nations homelessness. These include:
 - lower levels of education;
 - poorer health;
 - higher rates of unemployment;
 - lower income levels;
 - greater proportion of income from government transfers;
 - higher rates of poverty;
 - higher likelihoods of having a disability;
 - higher levels of sexual violence and violence against women, including high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women;
 - greater likelihood of being a victim of a violent crime;
 - high rates of placement within the child welfare system;
 - high incarceration rates and increased risk of homelessness following incarceration;
 - higher rates of discrimination in the housing market and in employment; and
 - more households in core housing need.

3. There are a number of demographic factors and trends relevant to First Nations homelessness.

- These demographic factors and social trends include:
 - The First Nations population is growing and without adequate and targeted intervention it could be a fast-growing homeless demographic.
 - The First Nations population is young and homelessness among Indigenous youth is on the rise¹.
 - First Nations have higher rates of lone-parent family households, which experience greater levels of poverty, putting them at greater risk of homelessness.
 - The First Nations off-reserve population is more mobile than the non-Indigenous population, which may mean they are more likely to face the impacts of tight, high-cost rental markets².
- First Nations people are over-represented among the homeless population, particularly in the Prairies, where 68.0% of shelter users are Indigenous compared to 10.4% of the total population.
- Based on available data, it is estimated that the minimum number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness at any given time in Canada is 9,191, but this is certainly an underestimate given the limitations in available data, including in the number of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness and homelessness on reserve.
- First Nations shelter users have shorter stays than non-Indigenous shelter users, but this is not necessarily a positive outcome, as analysis indicated that their stays are less likely to end

¹ Aboriginal Housing Management Association, N.D., The Roots of Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada

² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019, Market Predictors of Homelessness

because of finding housing, even when controlling for other confounding factors. This indicates that First Nations people face barriers in finding housing.

4. There are gaps in quantitative data related to First Nations experiences of homelessness.

- Some of the Census data on households in housing need is only available publicly for Indigenous people as a whole, rather than being First Nations people specifically.
- There is limited data on the extent of First Nations homelessness, and in particular, the extent of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness, homelessness on reserve, and First Nations specific data on people experiencing homelessness off reserve, rather than Indigenous people as a whole.
- There is limited data on the characteristics of First Nations people experiencing homelessness, and whether and how homelessness disproportionately affects particular population groups, such as 2SLGBTQIA+, First Nations youth, First Nations women, First Nations adults, and First Nations seniors.
- There is limited data on what forms of homelessness are most pervasive among First Nations people across the country or in different parts of the country and how experiences (forms, durations and frequencies of homelessness) differ across population groups.

5. There are a number of flaws in current funding programs to address homelessness.

- Most Indigenous funding programs are not delivered through governance structures that respect First Nations self-determination. Almost all of the funding programs are delivered through an application process to the federal or provincial government, with the notable exception of the federal government's Reaching Home program, where funding is distributed through a Community Entity which has an agreement with the federal government. Indigenous organizations are given priority to act as the Community Entity for the Indigenous Homelessness funding stream.
- Funding for Indigenous homelessness is low compared to the proportion of the homeless population and population with unmet housing needs who are Indigenous.
- There are regional disparities in the availability of funding to address homelessness across the country. Provincial programs dedicated to providing supports dedicated to Indigenous homelessness were identified in just two provinces: British Columbia and Ontario.
- Limited funding for homelessness is available on reserve. Most provincial programs are only available off reserve, with the notable exception of British Columbia's Indigenous Housing Fund.
- Approaches used for the broader Canadian population, such as Housing First and coordinated access, are being modified to better meet the needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness; however, more work often remains to be done to ensure services are specifically informed by First Nations perspectives and respect First Nations self-determination.

- Existing analysis of services aimed at addressing First Nations homelessness typically takes a pan-Indigenous approach, possibly because urban Indigenous organizations providing housing and homelessness services typically serve First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
- Funding programs should allow for flexibility to adapt these models to meet local First Nations community needs, for example making adaptations to the intake process and assessment tools to ensure they are not re-traumatizing individuals.
- Connecting cultural teachings and practices is also important, such as incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the model's core principles and connecting with Elders and incorporating sharing circles.
- The pan-Indigenous research found that a key element to achieving a localized model is for local Indigenous leaders and knowledge keepers to lead, or at a minimum be engaged in the co-creation of the approach/model based on a relationship of trust and inclusiveness. However, from a First Nation perspective, a key element would be for First Nation leaders and knowledge keepers to lead or be engaged in the co-creation of the approach/model.

Recommendations

The following 13 recommendations have been developed to improve delivery of programs and services to First Nations people experiencing homelessness based on the findings of the environmental scan. Further input and advice should be gathered in Phase 2 from regional organizations, experts, First Nations leaders and others on ways and means to improve the programs and services related to the reduction or elimination of First Nations homelessness.

1. Governments and mainstream organizations should increase their sharing of research data with First Nations organizations. This includes existing research conducted by ESDC, such as its Indigenous Homelessness Study and its analysis of the 2018 nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count. The sharing of regionally and nationally consolidated data is critical, because the population of First Nations people experiencing homelessness may not be large enough to allow for detailed community level reporting and generalization in some communities.
2. Research should be conducted by First Nations organizations or in partnership with First Nations/Indigenous organizations to ensure the research reflects the interests and concerns of First Nations organizations and survey tools are culturally appropriate for First Nations people experiencing homelessness.
3. Research findings should report on First Nations specifically, where possible, as opposed to Indigenous people as a whole to increase knowledge of the specific needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness.
4. Additional research on the extent of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness and homelessness on reserve should be undertaken.
5. Governments should increase First Nations control and care over housing by increasing the funding programs that are delivered through governance structures that respect First Nations self-determination. The federal Reaching Home program's Indigenous Homelessness stream is one

interim step towards respecting First Nations self-determination: an Indigenous organization is responsible for community allocation of the funding.

6. The proportion of funding targeted towards Indigenous homelessness should be increased to address inequities in funding allocations and align with level of need.
7. Provincial governments should specifically allocate funding to address Indigenous homelessness in addition to broadly based funding to address homelessness.
8. Governments should reduce restrictions where funding is being used and allow funding to be used both on and off reserve (as long as this does not jeopardize federal funding).
9. First Nations homelessness services must be decolonized from traditional Western approaches and reflect more deeply Indigenous worldviews. This includes acknowledgement of the self-determination and jurisdiction of First Nations communities and leaders to address and respond to the needs of their peoples. As the Federal Government continues to strengthen its relationships with First Nations, including increased capacity for First Nations to provide services to their citizens living in urban centres, it provide an opportunities for a growing presence and voice to First Nations in the solutions to First Nations homelessness.
10. First Nations homelessness services should be based on a holistic definition of First Nations homelessness. While a definition of Indigenous homelessness was developed by Thistle, a First Nations-specific definition may also be beneficial.
11. Opportunities must be created for greater leadership and autonomy of First Nations to enable funding and services to be First Nations led and delivered. While there may be opportunities for partnerships between First Nations governments/organizations, Indigenous organizations, and mainstream homelessness funders, governance bodies, and service providers, there is a need to ensure that First Nations experts and leadership have at least equal power in the process of co-creating services. Importantly, this includes addressing underfunding issues of Indigenous organizations to support the same capacity as non-Indigenous organizations.
12. All decision-makers and service providers should be culturally informed, which means having Indigenous representatives in leadership and management positions within mainstream service organizations and cultural competency training for staff. It also means strengthening relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers so that non-Indigenous organizations are better informed and better able to provide culturally appropriate supports.
13. Services created to address First Nations homelessness should consider promising practices in service delivery to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, including:
 - Incorporating cultural values and practices, like incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings and Medicine Wheel into the service's core principles, engaging in ceremonies, and supporting connections to Elders and to community
 - Taking a trauma-informed approach, including developing intake processes and assessments that avoid re-traumatization
 - Supporting the whole person, including their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs, in the context of their families, communities, and Nations.

Introduction and Background

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a national organization that advocates on a wide variety of issues on behalf of over 600 First Nation communities in Canada.

In 2019, the Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 79/2019, which calls for an “Action Plan for First Nations Homelessness On and Off Reserve”. Specifically, the Resolution directs the AFN to

- identify resources to do research, with external partners where possible gather data on causes of homelessness and gaps in services;
- seek resources to develop a draft national First Nations Homelessness Strategy;
- advocate for a multi-partner solution to address First Nations homelessness;
- develop measures to improve the delivery of federal government homelessness programs;
- urge the federal government to work with First Nations and the AFN on immediately improving social programs and fiscal mechanisms to address homelessness; and
- urge Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to amend criteria to access the rural budget component to enable First Nations to build shelters and group homes on-reserve.

The work to implement Resolution 79/2019 is being undertaken in two phases:

Phase 1 – Research: this includes:

- a) a systematic review of the academic and grey literature related to First Nations homelessness;
- b) an environmental scan of the programs, services and related systems in place; and
- c) a systems map of the First Nations homelessness system as a whole.

Phase 2 - Engagements and Discussions: this phase will focus on gathering input and advice from regional organizations, experts, First Nations leaders and others on how to improve the programs and services related to the reduction or elimination of First Nations homelessness.

Indigenuity Consulting Group Inc. was contracted to conduct the environmental scan component (section b) of Phase 1. The overarching objective of the environmental scan is to “to understand the issues, trends and data pertaining to First Nations homelessness”. Simultaneous projects are being undertaken to carry out the literature review and systems mapping elements of the research.

Methodology

Quantitative data was prioritized in searches for information to inform the environmental scan. This is because the literature review that was being conducted simultaneously that would focus on qualitative, academic literature. Grey literature (published material from governmental and non-governmental organizations) was used to fill in the gaps and create a more fulsome picture on First Nations homelessness. The scan included:

- A review of Census data and other Statistics Canada information.
- A review of Point-in-Time Homelessness Count and national shelter utilization data to provide baseline information on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness.

- A systematic review of federal department websites and reports to record where programs and services exist, and where they do not, and to identify relevant data.
- A systematic review of provincial programs through websites and reports.
- An Internet search of grey literature, primarily focusing on services informed by First Nations perspectives.

One of the challenges in conducting the research for the environmental scan is that much of the data groups First Nations with other Indigenous population groups together and simply refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people as “Indigenous peoples”. Whenever possible, the environmental scan provides information specific to First Nations, but much of the data and research on best practices applies more broadly to Indigenous People. Distinct perspectives and experiences of First Nations people may be obscured because of this, and systemic issues specific to First Nations may be missed, which may limit the production of effective policy or interventions to address First Nations homelessness.

Organization of Environmental Scan:

The findings of the environmental scan are organized into six sections:

1. First Nations Perspectives and Experiences with Homelessness: includes a definition of Indigenous homelessness, an exploration of the causes of First Nations homelessness and how these differ from the broader Canadian population, and a review of self-reported factors contributing to homelessness.
2. Demographic and Social Factors Impacting First Nations Homelessness.
3. Profile of First Nations People Experiencing Homelessness.
4. Programs for First Nations People Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness.
5. Improving Service Delivery.
6. Conclusions and Recommendations.

1. First Nations Perspectives on Homelessness

While the environmental scan sought to identify First Nations perspectives on homelessness, including a definition of First Nations homelessness, no First Nations-specific definition was found in grey literature. The definitions identified were all pan-Indigenous. A First Nations-specific definition of homelessness may be a possible area for future research. A pan-Indigenous definition of homelessness is discussed below.

In 2017, Jessie Thistle, a Métis-Cree author and historian asserted a definition of Indigenous Homelessness. This definition was created in part to address the fact that the definition of homelessness in Canada has historically ignored the distinct cultural and social dynamics at play within Indigenous communities, and was developed based on extensive consultation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit people with lived experience of homelessness, as well as Indigenous scholars, front-line workers and community members working in the field.

Thistle's definition frames Indigenous homelessness through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews as a breakdown of healthy relationships with self, family, community, land, water, place, animals, culture and language resultant from colonial disruptions. This emphasizes a holistic concept of "home" and contrasts with standard definitions of homelessness, which focus on housing precarity or lack of habitation structure. This definition has been widely cited and adopted since its publication.

In 2019, the Advisory Committee on Homelessness that was mandated to support the redesign of ESDC's Homelessness Partnering Strategy recommended that the updated program adopt Thistle's definition of Indigenous homelessness. However, the updated program, 'Reaching Home', has not yet adopted Thistle's definition.

Indigenous homelessness is a human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships (Thistle, J. (2017.) Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada)

For the purposes of the 'Reaching Home' program (ie. Canada's Homelessness Strategy), ESDC has defined Indigenous homelessness as "Indigenous Peoples who are in the state of having no home due to colonization, trauma and/or whose social, cultural, economic, and political conditions place them in poverty. Having no home includes: those who alternate between shelter and unsheltered, living on the

street, couch surfing, using emergency shelters, living in unaffordable, inadequate, substandard and unsafe accommodations or living without the security of tenure; anyone regardless of age, released from facilities (such as hospitals, mental health and addiction treatment centers, prisons, transition houses), fleeing unsafe homes as a result of abuse in all its definitions, and any youth transitioning from all forms of care”.

Consistent with Thistle’s definition of Indigenous homelessness, which shows that Indigenous homelessness represents a loss of Indigeneity, the Native Women’s Association of Canada also argues that Indigenous homelessness must be viewed through a lens of Indigenous culture. The Native Women’s Association points out that under international law, to be adequately housed means to have secure tenure—not having to worry about being evicted or having your home or lands taken away. It means living somewhere that is in keeping with your culture, and having access to appropriate services, schools, and employment.

Thistle argues that “because a lack of home, much as a sense of place or homeplace, is a culturally understood experience, we must develop and recognize an Indigenous definition of homelessness that must inform policy-making to solve the tragedy of Indigenous homelessness.” Given the lack of a First Nation’s definition, the environmental scan used this definition to guide our understanding and responses to First Nations homelessness.

2. Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Causes of First Nations Homelessness:

First Nations experiences of homelessness can be directly linked to centuries of federal and provincial laws and actions that have harmed First Nations Peoples, including Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the Indian Act. The abuse, cultural genocide and intergenerational trauma caused by these actions have all contributed to the fracturing of communities, families, and kinship systems, and have dispossessed First Nations people of their lands, human rights, ways of life, and spiritual and cultural practices.

The imposition of these systems, combined with the ongoing process of colonization and contemporary marginalization of First Nations people, has resulted in disparities between First Nations populations and non-Indigenous people that contribute to contemporary experiences of First Nations homelessness. These include:

- Lower levels of education – 29% of the First Nations population (aged 15+) living on reserve and 40% of the First Nations population off reserve have some form of post-secondary education, compared to 56% of the non-Indigenous population³. (Note: data is from 2016, unless otherwise specified).
- Poorer health – 49% of the First Nations population (aged 15+) report their health as very good or excellent compared to 60% of the non-Indigenous population⁴.
- Higher rates of unemployment – 51.7% of the First Nations population (aged 15+) on reserve and 38.6% of the First Nations population off reserve are not in the labour force and 24.9% and 15.3% of the on and off reserve population, respectively, are unemployed⁵. This compares to 34.6% of the non-Indigenous population who are not in the labour force and 7.4% who are unemployed.
- Lower income levels – The median individual income of First Nations people on reserve is \$16,907 and off reserve is \$25,134, whereas non-Indigenous people have a median income of \$35,536⁶.
- Greater proportion of income from government transfers – For the average First Nations person (aged 15+) on reserve, 72.4% of their total income was from market sources such as employment, investment or retirement income with the residual 27.6% coming from government transfers⁷. This compares to 88.4% of income from market sources for the First Nations population off reserve. The percentage for First Nations off reserve was similar to the non-Indigenous population at 88.5%.
- Higher rates of poverty – The First Nations population off reserve have a low-income prevalence rate of 29.7% compared to 13.8% of the non-Indigenous population⁸.

³ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

⁴ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

⁵ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

⁶ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

⁷ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

⁸ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016. Similar data is not available for the on-reserve population.

- Higher likelihoods of having a disability (e.g., physical and/or mental health condition, or substance abuse) – Disability rates among First Nations people living off reserve are 32%, compared to non-Indigenous people at 22%⁹.
- Higher levels of sexual violence and violence against women, including high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women – 45.7% of First Nations women report being a victim of sexual violence by a non intimate partner in their lifetime, compared to 29.9% of non-Indigenous women¹⁰. 17.7% of First Nations women report being a victim of sexual violence by an intimate partner, compared to 11.8% of non-Indigenous women.
- Greater likelihood of being a victim of a violent crime – The rate of violent victimization for Indigenous women in 2014 was 220 violent incidents per 1,000 people, while the rate for Indigenous men was 110 per 1,000¹¹. The rate of violent victimization reported by non-Indigenous women was 81 per 1,000, and for non-Indigenous men was 66 per 1,000.
- High rates of placement within the child welfare system – 42.3% of children in foster care are First Nations children even though First Nations children only represent 5.3% of all children aged 0 to 14¹². In 2016, there were 12,135 First Nations children aged 0 to 14 reported as foster children living in private homes. While data is not available on the number of youth that have experience with the child welfare system who become homeless, in Vancouver, it has been estimated that 50% of the 700 Indigenous youth that age out of foster care each year will end up on the streets as part of the city’s homeless population¹³.
- High incarceration rates, and increased risk of homelessness following incarceration – In 2017/2018, Indigenous adults accounted for 30% of admissions to provincial/territorial custody and 29% of admissions to federal custody, while representing approximately 4% of the Canadian adult population¹⁴. These rates are increasing: ten years prior, 21% of admissions to provincial/territorial custody and 20% of admissions to federal custody were Indigenous.
- Higher rates of discrimination in the housing market and in employment – Quantitative data is not available, but numerous qualitative research studies have found that First Nations people experience racially-motivated housing discrimination¹⁵.

The numerous negative impacts stemming from collective and individual intergenerational trauma as a result of Indigenous peoples being subjected to assimilation policies and practices are often

⁹ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

¹¹ Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018

¹² Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

¹³ HUMA, *Evidence*, 3 December 2020, 1655 (Marcel Lawson-Swain).

¹⁴ Government of Canada, Department of Justice, JustFacts, accessed at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2019/may01.html>

¹⁵ Source: Motz, T.A., and Currie C.L., 2019, Racially-motivated housing discrimination experienced by Indigenous postsecondary students in Canada: impacts on PTSD symptomology and perceptions of university stress, *Public Health*, Vol. 176, P. 59-67; Novac Sylvia et al, 2002, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Research Bulletin #11, Housing Discrimination in Canada: What Do We Know About It?

compounded by one another, collectively contributing to greater rates of homelessness for Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people.

For example, poor health resulting from intergenerational trauma is compounded by inadequate housing as well as limited education and employment opportunities, which have been identified as contributing to Indigenous people being in contact with the criminal justice system more often, and the criminal justice system often fails to support transitions from incarceration back into one's own community, resulting in an increased risk of homelessness¹⁶.

Housing affordability and other unmet housing needs are major factors contributing to First Nations homelessness. First Nations people are more likely to have one or more unmet housing needs, such as:

- Greater prevalence of inadequate housing – 44.1% of the First Nations population on reserve and 24.2% of the First Nations population off reserve live in inadequate housing that is in need of major repairs, compared to 6.0% of the non-Indigenous population.
- Higher rates of housing that is not suitable for the size of the household – 36.8% of the First Nations population on reserve and 18.5% of the First Nations population off reserve are living in unsuitable housing, compared to 8.5% of the non-Indigenous population.
- Rates of affordability issues (spending 30% or more of income on housing) are comparable among Indigenous and non-Indigenous households living off reserve, although percentage of income spent on housing does not factor in the suitability (whether it is an appropriate size) of the housing – 39.3% of Indigenous renters living off reserve and 13.9% of Indigenous owners are spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs. This compares to 40.0% of non-Indigenous renters and 16.7% of non-Indigenous owners¹⁷. It should also be noted that the affordability issues of First Nations households may be obscured by this pan-Indigenous statistic, as the majority of Inuit live in social housing¹⁸ and spend less than 30% of income on housing, which may be bringing down the percentage for Indigenous households as a whole.
- More households in core housing need – In 2016, 21.1% (81,275) of First Nations people off reserve were in core housing need. This compares to 12.4% of the non-Indigenous population. A household is said to be in 'core housing need' if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards).
- Adequacy- and suitability-based housing need¹⁹ is reported for on reserve households, rather than core housing need. In 2011, 33.4% of households on reserve were living in adequacy- and suitability-based housing need.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, Department of Justice, Understanding the Overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Criminal Justice System, accessed at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/socjs-esjp/en/ind-aut/uo-cs>

¹⁷Data on spending on housing in not published for First Nations people living on-reserve

¹⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004, Backgrounder on Inuit and Housing

¹⁹ Adequacy- and suitability-based housing need means that the household is living in a dwelling that does not meet one or both of the adequacy and suitability standards, and the household would have to spend 30 per cent

Affordability is the primary issue for the majority of Indigenous households in core housing need. Eighty-one percent of Indigenous households in core need were experiencing affordability issues. This compares to 17.8% who were experiencing suitability issues (ie. not enough bedrooms for the size of the household) and 24.2% who were experiencing adequacy issues (ie. housing that is reported by their residents as requiring major repairs). A household lives in adequacy- and suitability-based housing need if its dwelling does not meet one or both of the adequacy (in need of major repairs) and suitability standards (not enough bedrooms for the size of the household), and the household would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax income to pay the shelter costs of alternative acceptable local housing.

The incomes of Indigenous households in core housing need show a high degree of affordability need among these households. The median income of Indigenous households in core housing need in 2016 was \$24,965. Comparatively, First Nations households on reserve had a median income of \$17,029. Based on 30% of income spent on shelter, the standard threshold for what is considered affordable, the median affordable spending on shelter for Indigenous households in core housing need (off-reserve) was \$624, while their average shelter costs were \$917. They would require an average housing subsidy of \$293 per month, or \$3,516 per year, to afford their current housing. This level of subsidy, however, would not fully address the needs of Indigenous households in core housing need who were living in housing that was in need of major repair or not suitably sized for the number of people in their household. For Indigenous households in core need to afford adequate and suitably sized housing, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that Indigenous households living outside of major urban centres would need a housing subsidy of \$333 per month and Indigenous households in major urban centres would need \$475 per month²⁰.

Even with comparable income, Indigenous households are more likely to be in core housing need. Indigenous households with a total income in the lowest quintile (i.e. 20%) of the household income distribution were 1.3 times more likely to be in core housing need than non-Indigenous households in the lowest quintile of the household income distribution. Likewise, Indigenous households in the second-lowest quintile of household incomes were 1.6 times more likely to be in core housing need than the income-equivalent non-Indigenous households. One factor contributing to a higher rate of housing need among Indigenous families is that larger families face higher shelter costs due to the size of suitable dwellings. Indigenous families in housing need are, on average, larger than non-Indigenous families.

The issue of core housing need is particularly prevalent for a number of population groups:

or more of its before-tax income to pay the shelter costs of alternative acceptable local housing. These costs on reserves are estimated as the carrying costs of a newly constructed home, including mortgage payments (principal and interest), taxes, and utilities. It should be noted that while the definitions of core housing need and adequacy and suitability need are quite similar, there are some differences. Off-reserve, it is first tested whether the household fails to meet one of three standards – affordability, adequacy or suitability, and then if so, it is tested whether the households is able to afford the median market rent. On reserve, it is first tested whether the household fails to meet one of two standards- adequacy or suitability (not affordability), and then if so, it is tested whether the households is able to afford the cost of newly built ownership housing. The main differences are the affordability is not tested in the first stage on reserve but is off reserve, and then off-reserve uses an affordability calculation based on the cost of new ownership housing, while off-reserve affordability is calculated based on median rents.

²⁰ Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2021, Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous Housing

- Rates of core housing need are higher among First Nations renters (36.1% and 34.7% of Status and non-Status renters respectively) than First Nations owners (8.3% and 6.6% of Status and non-Status owners respectively).
- Almost one quarter (24.9%) of households led by First Nations people 30 to 44 years of age are in core housing need. This is higher than other age cohorts, whose rates of core need range from 16.3% to 18.5%.
- Core housing need is highest among First Nations lone-parent families of all ages (44.5% of lone parent families with children under 18 are in core housing need compared to 8.9% of First Nations couples with children).
- Larger Indigenous families are more likely to be in core housing need.

Self-Reported Factors Contributing to Homelessness:

Shelters typically ask shelter users their reasons for accessing shelter. Surveys conducted as part of homelessness enumerations also typically ask respondents about reasons for their housing loss.

Research by ESDC based on national shelter data found that almost two-thirds of Indigenous shelter users (with reasons given for using shelter) cited housing loss (because of an emergency, eviction or other reason) as a reason they were using shelter²¹. First Nations-specific data is not available.

Although overall self-reported rates were low, Indigenous shelter users were more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous shelter users to report substance abuse issues or financial reasons as a reason for their shelter use (see table below).

Reasons Given for Using Shelter, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Lost housing (emergency, evicted, or other reason)	65.3%	41.4%
Financial reasons	8.3%	3.6%
Transient lifestyle	8.3%	18.4%
Other	6.3%	17.0%
Substance abuse	4.8%	1.9%
Family/relationship breakdown	3.5%	10.1%
Discharge from treatment/jail	2.9%	6.0%
Escaping abuse	0.6%	1.6%

Source: Memorandum for the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

As of 2019, Indigenous Services Canada’s Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) provided operational funding to 41 shelters for women and children living on-reserve across the provinces and Yukon. Five more were under construction at the time (2019) the Standing Committee on the Status of Women prepared its report on shelters and transition homes serving women and children affected by

²¹ Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019, Memorandum for the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

violence²². Another 12 new shelters were approved for funding as of June 21, 2021²³. The 41 shelters in operation in 2019 serve approximately 330 First Nations communities, which represent approximately 55% of all First Nations communities. Data is available from Statistics Canada’s Transition Home survey on women’s reasons for seeking shelter, but published data is not specific to on-reserve shelters.

While all communities that participated in the nationally coordinated Point-in-Time count of homelessness in Canadian communities collected data on reasons people cite for housing loss, ESDC has not yet published this data for First Nations people or Indigenous people as a group or the general homeless population. Very few communities have published this data for First Nations people or Indigenous people as a group in their own community homelessness enumeration reports. Among the 126 communities with homelessness enumeration reports that were reviewed for the environmental scan, only one community, Ottawa, reported on reasons for housing loss among Indigenous people. Although not generalizable to the Indigenous population nation-wide, top reasons Indigenous people cited for housing loss in Ottawa were addiction/substance abuse (24%), conflict with spouse/partner (14%), incarceration (13%), unable to pay rent/mortgage (13%), illness/medical condition (12%), and unsafe housing conditions (11%)²⁴.

Demographic and Social Factors Impacting First Nations Homelessness:

Several demographic factors and social trends are relevant to First Nations homelessness:

- The First Nations population is growing and without adequate and targeted intervention it could be a fast-growing homeless demographic – The First Nations population, including both those who are registered or treaty Indians under the *Indian Act* and those who are not, grew by 39.3% from 2006 to reach 977,230 people in 2016²⁵. The First Nations population is projected to increase by between 1,333,000 and 1,685,000 people between 2011 and 2036²⁶.
- The First Nations population is young and homelessness among Indigenous youth is on the rise²⁷ – The median age of the First Nations population is 27.0, over 14 years younger than the non-Indigenous population (with a median age of 41.3)²⁸. 29.2% of First Nations people were 14 years of age or younger in 2016, over four times the proportion of those 65 years of age and older (6.4%). By 2036, the First Nations population is expected to have a median age between 32.5 years and 35.2 years²⁹.

²² Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2019, Report 15 - Surviving Abuse and Building Resilience—A Study of Canada’s Systems of Shelters and Transition Houses Serving Women and Children Affected by Violence

²³ CMHC, Funding Available for Shelters On-Reserve, accessed at: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs/all-funding-programs/shelters-initiative-for-indigenous-women-and-children/funding-available-for-shelters-on-reserve>

²⁴ City of Ottawa, Everyone Counts: Ottawa’s 2018 Point-in-Time Count

²⁵ Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

²⁶ Source: Statistics Canada, Demography Division, 2015 – Reference Scenario. Population figures include the Census undercount

²⁷ Aboriginal Housing Management Association, N.D., The Roots of Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada

²⁸ Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

²⁹ Source: Statistics Canada, Demography Division, 2015 – Reference Scenario. Population figures include the Census undercount

- First Nations have higher rates of lone-parent family households, which experience greater levels of poverty, putting them at greater risk of homelessness – 16.2% of Indigenous households off reserve are lone-parent family households versus 9.8% of non-Indigenous households³⁰. In 2011 on reserve, 23.0% of households were lone-parent households³¹.
- The First Nations off-reserve population is more mobile than the non-Indigenous population, which may mean they are more likely to face the impacts of tight, high-cost rental markets³². Amongst the on-reserve population, 8.3% had moved in the year prior to the Census (either from the reserve to off-reserve or between two off-reserve locations) and 24.0% had moved in the five years prior to the Census, whereas 21.2% of the First Nations population off reserve had moved in the year prior to the Census and 51.2% had moved in the five years prior to the Census. This compares to 12.9% and 38.0% of non-Indigenous people who had moved in the prior one and five years respectively.
- The Indigenous population is increasingly moving to cities³³. More than half (51.8%) of the total Indigenous population were living in a metropolitan area in 2016³⁴. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of Indigenous people living in metropolitan areas increased by nearly 60%.

Despite representing a significant proportion of the homeless population, no comprehensive data exists on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness nation-wide. The data that is available has substantial limitations and is primarily pan-Indigenous.

The most recent nationally coordinated Point-in-Time counts of people experiencing homelessness were conducted in the Spring of 2021, but results are not yet available. Therefore, this environmental scan reports on data collected during the 2018 count. Point-in-Time counts have two primary components. The first is an enumeration, or count, of people experiencing absolute homelessness, meaning people staying in shelters or on the streets at a given time. The second is a survey of people experiencing homelessness which captures information on demographics and service needs.

Sixty-one communities participated in the 2018 nationally coordinated count and used consistent methodologies. Beyond the nationally coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) count, research identified another 64 communities that have conducted homelessness enumerations using varying methodologies and definitions of homelessness. Research only identified one First Nation that has conducted a homelessness enumeration on reserve³⁵. PiT Counts also likely undercount the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness. Reasons for this include overrepresentations of First Nations people among hidden homeless populations; movement between urban communities and reserves; and hesitancy to participate in PiT Counts³⁶. Both the lack of data from many communities and methodological limitations make it difficult to accurately estimate the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness on a given day.

³⁰ Source: Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

³¹ Source: CMHC, NHS-based housing indicators and data, 2011

³² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019, Market Predictors of Homelessness

³³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019, Market Predictors of Homelessness

³⁴ Statistics Canada, Census, 2016

³⁵ Alberta Rural Development Network, 2018 Rural Homelessness Estimation Project, Kainai First Nation Community Report, 2019

³⁶ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Point-in-Time Count Toolkit, Fostering Aboriginal Partnerships and Competency During Your Point-in-Time Count

Despite these limitations, available data from homelessness enumerations in 125 communities have been compiled and demonstrate:

- Of the 32,806 people identified as experiencing homelessness in 112 communities across Canada³⁷, 10,833 people had Indigenous identities
- Indigenous people accounted for 33% of the overall homeless population, despite accounting for only 4.7% of the total population in those communities
- First Nations people accounted for 28% of the homeless population in the 44 communities that reported on the number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness, whereas they represented 2.0% of the population in these communities, highlighting the overrepresentation of First Nations people among those experiencing homelessness
- Based on the communities reporting on Indigenous and First Nations identities, on any given night, 2.6% of the First Nations population, and 1.1% of the Indigenous population as a whole is experiencing homelessness, compared to 0.11% of the non-Indigenous population
- On any given night, 1 in 38 of the First Nations population, and 1 in 90 of the Indigenous population as a whole is experiencing homelessness, compared to 1 in 900 of the non-Indigenous population
- The rate of homelessness among First Nations homelessness was 23 times higher, and Indigenous people as a whole was 10 times higher, than non-Indigenous people.

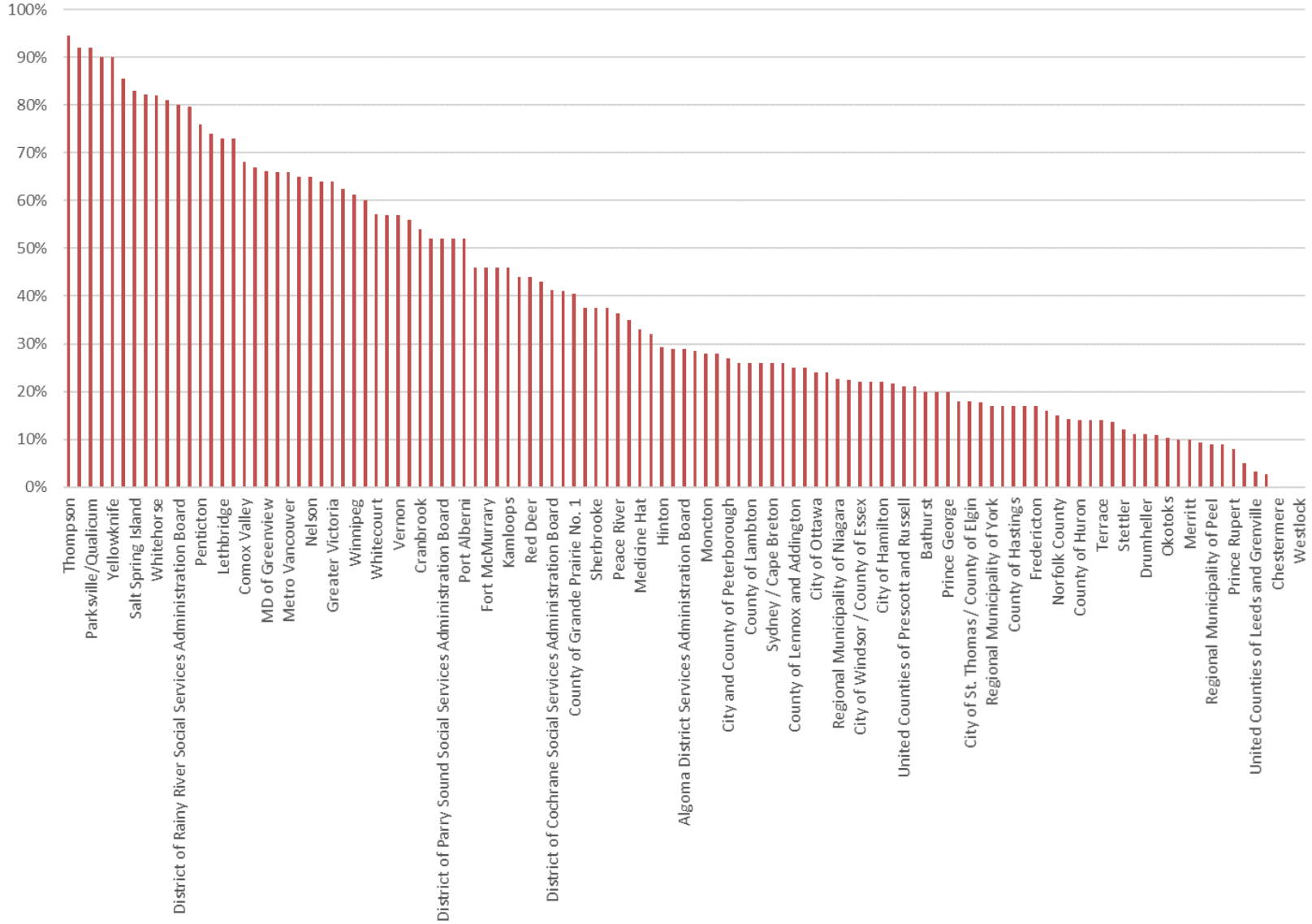
While the number of communities that reported First Nations-specific data is limited, available data suggests that the vast majority of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness across Canada are First Nations. Extrapolating from the available data, it is estimated that 9,191 of the 10,833 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in the 112 communities across Canada that have released PiT count data were First Nations.

Given that these numbers do not reflect many First Nations people who are on reserve or provisionally accommodated, such as couch surfing, the actual number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness is likely significantly higher than these numbers indicate.

The proportion of the homeless population with Indigenous identities varies between communities and ranged from 0% to 95%. Thompson, Manitoba, reported the highest proportion with Indigenous identities.

³⁷ 112 communities reported on the total population experiencing homelessness and those with Indigenous identities. These communities had a total population of 20,289,232, representing 58% of the total population of Canada

Figure 1: Proportion of the Homeless Population with Indigenous Identities



Among communities reporting on First Nations experiencing homelessness, First Nations people ranged from 91% to 0% of the homeless population. Thompson, Manitoba reported the highest proportion of First Nations people. In almost all of the communities where data are available, First Nations people are over-represented among the homeless population.

Figure 2: Proportion of the Homeless Population with First Nations Identities

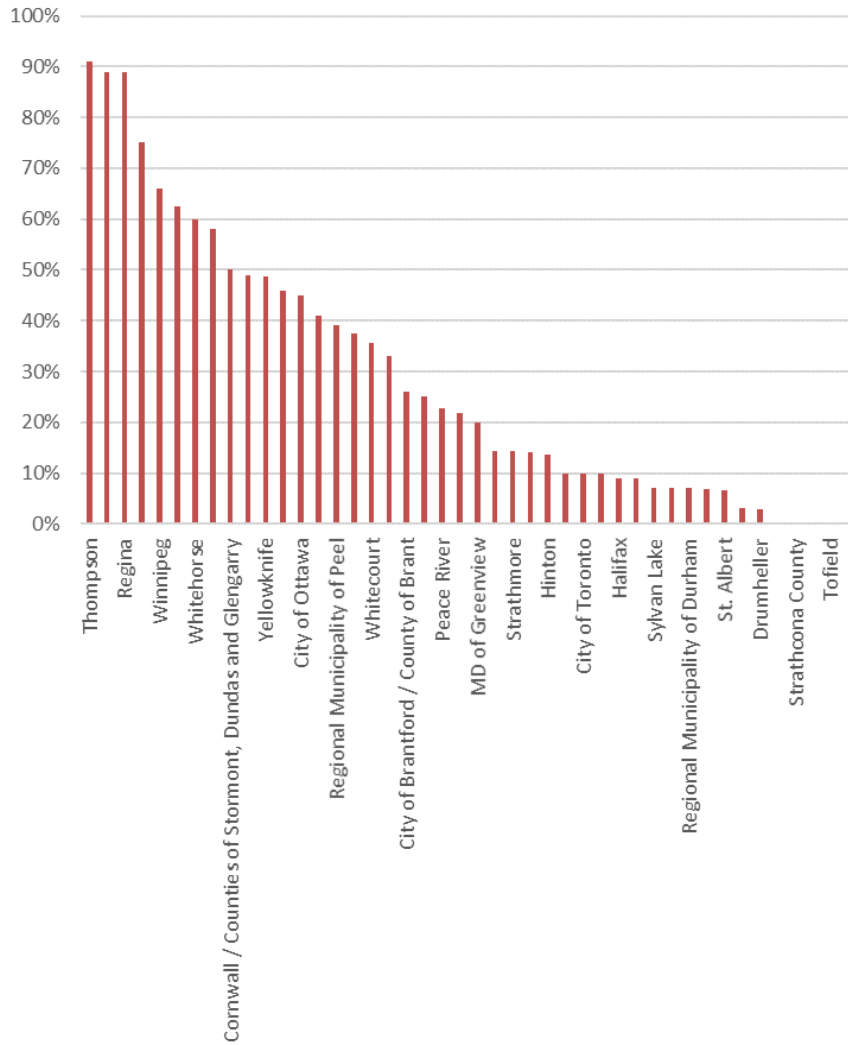
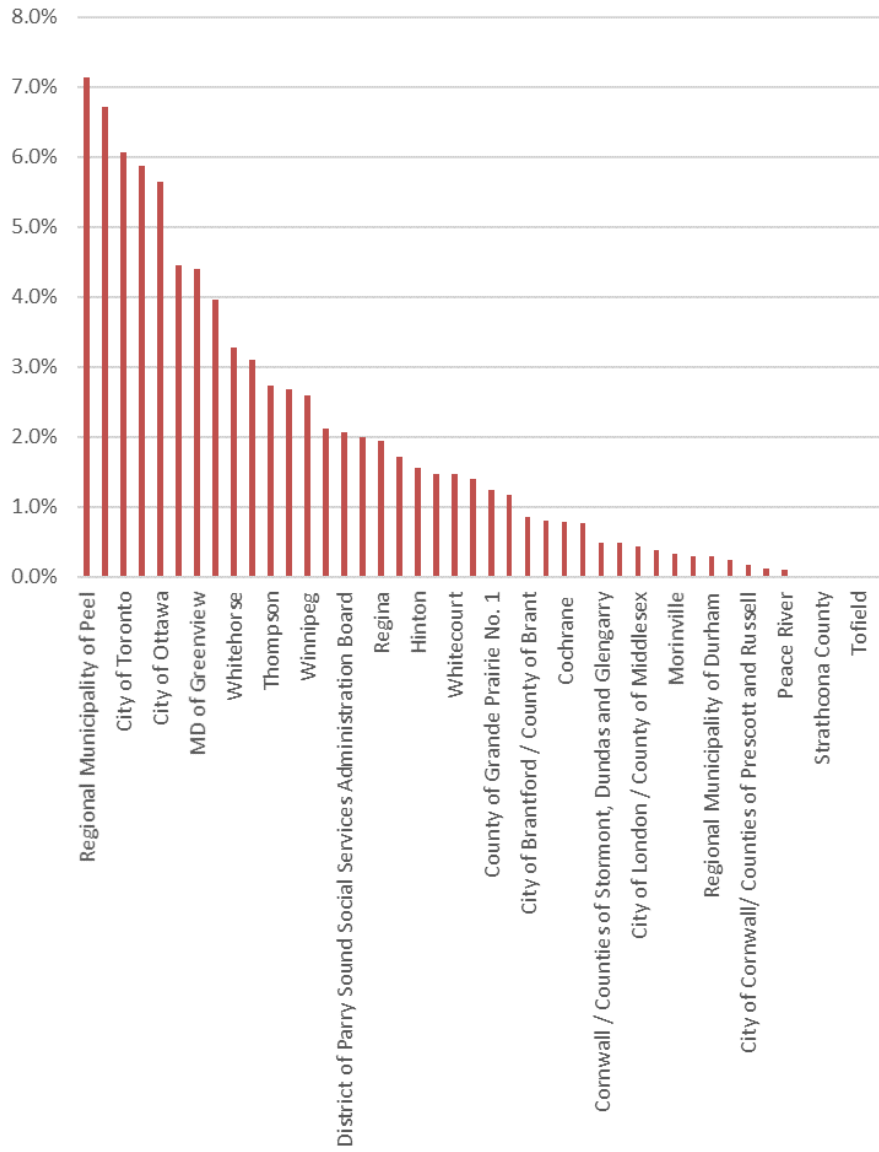


Figure 3: Ratio of First Nations People Experiencing Homelessness Compared to the First Nations Population by Community

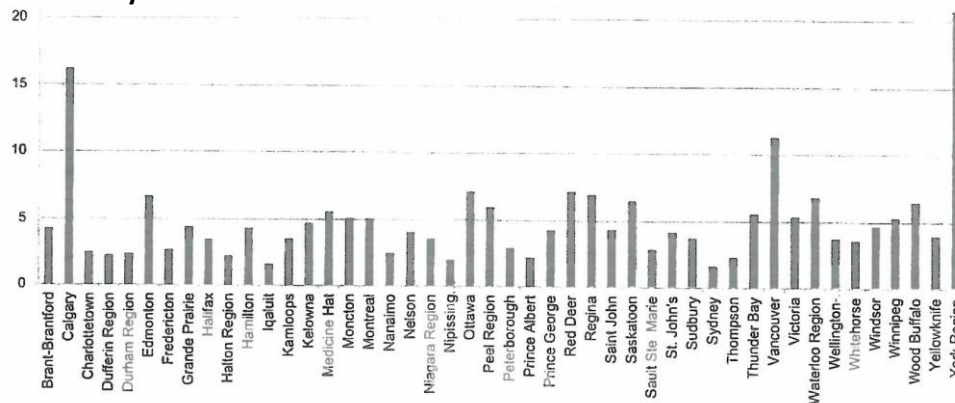


Randall Akee and Donna Feir have used census data and administrative data from the former Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (now Indigenous Services Canada/Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada) to estimate the number and rate of Registered Indians experiencing homelessness. Their estimate includes Registered Indians who are living both on and off reserve. Their calculation estimated that nearly 76,000 Registered Indians were homeless on any given day, when averaging 2001 and 2016 numbers³⁸. This represents close to 12% of the Registered Indian population.

While census data combined with administrative data from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Point-in-Time Counts are important for providing information on the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given day, other sources of information provide insights into the number of people experiencing homelessness over a period of time. Based on data collected by ESDC for its National Shelter Study, it is estimated that between 19,160 and 25,232 people that identified as First Nations used an emergency shelter in 2016³⁹. Overall, 17.1% of shelter users identified First Nations, and 30.7% had one or more Indigenous identities. This compares to 2.8% of the total Canadian population who identifies as First Nations and 4.9% who identifies as Indigenous. This again highlights the over representation of First Nations people within the homeless population. However, it should be noted that the nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness found that the percentage of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness was higher among Indigenous people who were staying in unsheltered locations (37%) and among those who were staying with others (43%)⁴⁰. This suggests that shelter-specific statistics are likely to underestimate the extent of First Nations homelessness and Indigenous homelessness as a whole.

The rate of Indigenous shelter users varies widely by region, from less than 5% reporting Indigenous identity in some suburban communities to over 90% in many northern communities, where Indigenous people make up a higher percentage of the population. Data has not been published on the ratio of First Nations people using shelters compared to the First Nations population.

Figure 4: Ratio of Indigenous people using Shelters Compared to the Indigenous population by community



Source: Memorandum for the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada, May 15, 2019

³⁸ Akee, Randall and Donna Feir, Estimating Institutionalization and Homelessness for Status First Nations in Canada: A Method and Implications, 2018

³⁹ ESDC, National Shelter Study, 2005-2016

⁴⁰ ESDC, Everyone Counts Highlights, Preliminary Results from the Second Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness in Canadian Communities, 2018

The highest over-representation was in the Prairies, where 68.0% of shelter users are Indigenous compared to 10.4% of the total population. Additional research would be required to determine key reasons for this. In each of the communities where data are available, Indigenous people are over-represented in emergency shelters compared to the overall population.

Percentage of Indigenous shelter users versus percentage of Indigenous population, by region (2016)

	Atlantic (NL, PEI, NB, NS)	East (ON, QC)	Prairie (MB, SK, AB)	West (BC)	North (NU, YT, NT)
% shelter users	10%	16%	67%	27%	76%
% population	5%	2.5%	10%	6%	52%

In 2016, the rate of shelter use for Indigenous people was 8.7 times greater than that of non-Indigenous people.

Rate of shelter use for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous people (2016)

Age	Children (0-14)	Youth (15-24)	Adults (25-64)	Seniors (65+)
Indigenous	7.3 times higher	5.4 times higher	10.0 times higher	11.6 times higher

The Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse (formerly the Transition Home Survey) provides information about the number of beds in shelters for abused women and their children and a point-in-time count of individuals living in these shelters, as well as their experiences with domestic abuse and addiction.

The latest available data is from 2018. A more recent survey provided a snapshot as of April 14, 2021. Data from this survey is scheduled to be released in April 2022.

April 18 2018, 729 Indigenous women and their 699 accompanying children were staying in shelters for abused women and children⁴¹. They represented 22% and 25% of residents, respectively.

Representation of Indigenous women and children was respectively 5 and 3 times higher in these facilities compared to their representation in the Canadian population. Data is not published for First Nations women specifically, nor is data published for shelters specifically on-reserve.

Hidden Homelessness:

Statistics Canada conducted a cycle on victimization as part of its General Social Survey of Canadians' Safety, which provided information on lifetime experiences of hidden homelessness. The survey found that 18.5% of people with Indigenous identity had experienced hidden homelessness⁴². This was more than twice the rate as non-Indigenous people (7.6%). The Survey defined hidden homelessness as

⁴¹ Statistics Canada. [Table 35-10-0054-01 One day snapshot of women and accompanying children \(number, percent\) in residential facilities for victims of abuse compared to private households, by selected characteristics](#)

⁴² Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), 2014

having “to temporarily live with family, friends, in their car, or anywhere else because they had nowhere else to live” (Rodrigue, 2016, p. 2).

Statistics Canada conducted modeling to determine predicted probabilities of having experienced hidden homelessness for people with various characteristics. Characteristics analyzed included sex, age, visible minority, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation, childhood victimization, legal responsibility of the government as a child, marital status, level of education, disabilities, mobility, sense of belonging to the local community, and number of victimizations in the past year. The modeling showed a predicted probability of someone with Indigenous identity having experienced hidden homelessness in their lifetime as 0.14%, or 1 in 7 Indigenous people. Because many of the characteristics related to homelessness could be related to one another, Statistics Canada also conducted modeling to examine the characteristics that are significant factors associated with hidden homelessness when all other characteristics are taken into account. The modeling showed that an Indigenous person still had among the highest predicted probability of having experienced hidden homelessness even when a wide range of sociodemographic characteristics were accounted for.

The factors that influence hidden homelessness are particularly prevalent on-reserve, but specific on- and off-reserve data has not been published. The extent of homelessness on-reserve is an area where further research would be beneficial.

3. Profile of Indigenous People Experiencing Homelessness

There is limited information on the characteristics of First Nations people experiencing homelessness. Most of the available data that is available is pan-Indigenous, although even this data is mainly limited to basic information such as gender and age.

The nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness in 2018 found that among the Indigenous population experiencing homelessness, 38.5% identified as female, 58.6% as male, and 2.9% as gender diverse. Respondents who identified as Indigenous were slightly more likely to identify as female or as gender diverse.

Those who identified as Indigenous accounted for 38% of respondents who identified as gender diverse. This is in part due to the number of respondents who identified their gender as two-spirit.

Gender of People Experiencing Homelessness, Everyone Counts – Point-in-Time Count, 2018

	Female	Male	Gender diverse
Indigenous	38.5%	58.6%	2.9%
Non-Indigenous	32.1%	66.2%	1.7%

Source: Everyone Counts – Point-in-Time Count, 2018

Looking specifically at shelter users, National Shelter Study data from 2016 found a similar proportion of Indigenous females (37.5%) versus males (62.2%) to the results from the 2018 Point-in-Time Count (Note: the use of the terms female and male are used here because these are the terms reported in the National Shelter Study). The study found that 3.7% of the Indigenous female population used shelters compared to 0.2% of the non-Indigenous female population. Among males, 8.2% of the Indigenous population used shelters versus 0.8% of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous males were over 10 times more likely to use a shelter than non-Indigenous males, whereas Indigenous females were over 15 times more likely to use a shelter than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness in 2018 provided an age breakdown of Indigenous shelter users and found that it is similar to non-Indigenous shelter users. Indigenous seniors are the most over-represented group of shelter users. Indigenous seniors are over 16 times more likely to use shelters than non-Indigenous seniors.

Distribution of Shelter Users by Age Group, 2016

	Children (0-15)	Youth (16-24)	Adults (25-64)	Seniors (65+)
Non-Indigenous	2.6%	16.4%	77.0%	4.1%
Indigenous	3.7%	12.9%	80.7%	2.8%

Source: Everyone Counts – Point-in-Time Count, 2018

ESDC's study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada did develop a detailed profile of the nature of shelter experiences of Indigenous people and looked specifically at First Nations as a sub-group⁴³. However, this information has not been released publicly.

Only 16 of the 125 communities with homelessness enumeration reports provided any information on the profile of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness aside from age and gender. None of the communities provided First Nations-specific data. While this report has provided this data where available, given the limited number of communities that have provided data, it is not necessarily generalizable to the population of First Nations or Indigenous people experiencing homelessness nationwide. Based on available data: 46% of Indigenous people experiencing any kind of homelessness self-reported having an acute or chronic health condition⁴⁴, 54% reported a mental health issue⁴⁵, 62% reported an addiction⁴⁶, and 33% reported a disability⁴⁷. Only two communities provided information on the level of need (often referred to as acuity) of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, so this data should be used with caution. Among the 83 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in these two communities, 6% had low acuity, 36% had moderate acuity, and 58% had high acuity. Data from Alberta's seven largest cities showed that 61% of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness had moved to the community in the past year⁴⁸. This may be because a mobile population is more vulnerable to homelessness. Based on data from seven communities in Ontario, 37% of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness had a history of involvement with the child welfare system⁴⁹.

While this data provides some insights into the characteristics of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, quantitative information specific to First Nations is not available, and even the pan-Indigenous data does not provide any insights about whether and how homelessness disproportionately affects particular population groups, such as 2SLGBTQQWIA, youth, women, adults, and seniors.

First Nations Experiences with Homelessness:

The ESDC study of Indigenous homelessness in Canada showed that Indigenous shelter users experience more shelter stays each year, higher rates of episodic homelessness (defined as having three or more shelter stays in the year) and are less likely to exit a shelter because of finding residence⁵⁰.

Shelter stays for Indigenous shelter users are shorter on average. First Nations shelter users had an average length of stay of 10 days. This is 6.6 days shorter than for non-Indigenous shelter users. The shorter stays for Indigenous shelter users are not necessarily a positive outcome, as analysis indicated that their stays are less likely to end because of finding residence, even when controlling for other confounding factors, including age, family status, gender, community, reason for access, and past shelter use.

⁴³ Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019, Memorandum for the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada

⁴⁴ Based on data from six communities with a total of 549 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁴⁵ Based on data from six communities with a total of 487 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁴⁶ Based on data from five communities with a total of 447 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁴⁷ Based on data from six communities with a total of 514 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁴⁸ The seven communities had a total of 2,740 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁴⁹ The seven communities had a total of 1,873 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness

⁵⁰ Memorandum for the Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada, Study of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada, May 15, 2019

On average, First Nations shelter users had 4.1 shelter stays per year, whereas non-Indigenous shelter users had 3.1 stays. This is after controlling for confounding factors.

On average, First Nations shelter users experience chronic homelessness slightly less often (4.9%) than non-Indigenous shelter users (5.3%). Chronic homelessness was defined as a shelter user staying 180+ nights in the year. However, 38.9% of First Nations shelter users experienced episodic homelessness (3+ episodes of homelessness during the year). This is higher than for non-Indigenous shelter users, at 34.1%.

Non-Indigenous shelter users are over twice as likely as First Nations shelter users to list finding housing as a reason for leaving the shelter. After controlling for age, gender, family status, community, reason for using shelter, and past shelter use, First Nations shelter users were 19.0% less likely to exit a shelter because they found housing. Indigenous shelter users were 18.5% more likely to exit shelter for another reason. The results indicate that Indigenous people face barriers in finding housing.

Reasons given for exiting shelter

	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
Reached maximum time allowed	1.7%	11.5%
Left area	6.1%	18.2%
Returned to street	1.9%	3.2%
Disagreement with rules / expelled	8.5%	4.8%
Other shelter / shelter program	9.1%	4.9%
Treatment program / hospital	2.9%	2.0%
Found residence	24.9%	12.4%
Whereabouts unknown	37.7%	31.9%
Other	7.2%	11.2%

Seven of the 125 communities with homelessness enumeration reports reported on the form of homelessness Indigenous people were experiencing, in particular, whether they were experiencing absolute homelessness, were sheltered, or were provisionally accommodated. However, some communities counted individuals who were provisionally accommodated, while others did not, which limits our ability to analyze this data.

Nine of the 125 communities with homelessness enumeration reports provided information on the proportion of the Indigenous population experiencing chronic homelessness and episodic homelessness. In these communities, 54% were experiencing chronic homelessness and 25% were experiencing episodic homelessness⁵¹. However, it should be noted that, by definition, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness are more likely to be encountered during a Point in Time count (snapshot in time) than individuals who experience homelessness for a shorter duration.

⁵¹ These communities had a total of 657 Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

There are a number of data gaps on the experiences of First Nations people who are homeless. Data is not available on what forms of homelessness are most pervasive among First Nations people across the country or in different parts of the country and how experiences differ across population groups.

4. Programs for First Nations People Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness

NATIONAL PROGRAMS:

Ten national housing programs providing support for First Nations homelessness, either on or off reserve, were identified based on a review of government websites and reports. They are described below. The listing does not include housing subsidies and grants or rental assistance that is not specific to homelessness.

Housing Program	Purpose	Timeframe	Funding Model	Target Population
1) Co-Investment Fund	To provide low-cost loans and capital contribution for repairing/renewing and building new affordable housing, shelters, transitional and supportive housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2016. Part of National Housing Strategy (NHS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application process to CMHC (one-time funding). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing providers Municipalities, provinces, territories Indigenous governments and organizations Private sector
2) Innovation Fund	Aimed at encouraging new funding models and innovative building techniques in affordable housing, creating inclusive and accessible communities, and addressing homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2016. Part of NHS. 5-year funding or until all funds assigned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two funding streams: new construction, revitalization. Application process to CMHC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals, corporations and organizations. On- and off-reserve funding.
3) SEED Funding	To provide interest-free loans and/or non repayable contributions to support costs related to pre-development activities. Includes Indigenous community housing, shelters, transitional housing and supportive housing, community and affordable housing, and renovation of existing affordable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2001. Part of Affordable Housing Initiative. Redesigned in 2018. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applications through CMHC. Loan program (interest free and non-repayable contributions). New construction stream and preservation stream. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing providers Municipalities, provinces, territories Indigenous governments and organizations Private sector
4) On-Reserve Shelter Enhancement Program	Provides forgivable loans for up to 100% of total eligible costs for the construction of new shelters. Intended use for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewal announced in 2020 to build 10 shelters in First Nations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of Interest (EOI) process to CMHC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All First Nations governments and organizations on-reserve.

Housing Program	Purpose	Timeframe	Funding Model	Target Population
	Indigenous women and children escaping family violence.	communities on-reserve across country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational support for the shelter through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). 	
5) Family Violence Prevention Program	To support day-to-day operations of 46 shelters, as well as funding for community-driven proposals for family violence prevention projects on- and off-reserve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 key components: operations and prevention projects. Annual Call for Proposals through Indigenous Services Canada for prevention activities. Annual funding for operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Nations Indigenous organizations located in territories Indigenous organizations on- and off-reserve Prevention and awareness funding also available to other non-governmental and non-profit organizations.
6) Rapid Housing Initiative	To help address urgent housing needs of vulnerable Canadians especially in light of the COVID -19 pandemic through the development of new permanent affordable housing units by providing capital contributions to cover costs associated with modular multi-unit rental construction; conversion of non-residential to affordable multi-residential homes; and, rehabilitation of buildings in disrepair and/or abandoned to affordable multi-residential homes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2020. Dedicated response to COVID-19. Falls under NHS. Additional funding allocated in 2021 budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major Cities Steam: funding allocated based on City. Project Stream: application process to CMHC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipalities, provinces, territories Indigenous governing bodies and organizations Non-profit organizations
7) Reaching Home – Indigenous Homelessness Stream	To provide funding to organizations that provide supports to meet the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who are experiencing or at risk of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Began in 2019. Replaced Homelessness Partnering Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding distributed through a Community Entity, which is a non profit or community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-profit and community-based organizations in urban centres. Priority for Indigenous organizations.

Housing Program	Purpose	Timeframe	Funding Model	Target Population
	homelessness. Intent is to provide funding to Indigenous organizations located in urban centres		organization (priority for Indigenous organizations), that has entered into an agreement with Employment and Social Development Canada <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 33 communities receive funding 	
8) Reaching Home – Community Capacity and Information Funding Stream	To support communities with the implementation of coordinated access and to foster innovation in the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began in 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must meet Reaching Home requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes Indigenous organizations (incorporated for profit and not for profit Indigenous controlled organizations, Indigenous controlled unincorporated associations, Indian Act Bands, Tribal Councils and Indigenous self government entities).
9) Reaching Home – Designated Communities Stream	Provides funding to 58 urban communities outside the territories that face significant issues with homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began in 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocations to designated communities. • Application process to become designated community. • Funding distributed through a Community Entity, which is a non profit, municipality, other or community organization that has entered into an agreement with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit organization • Municipality • Indigenous organizations (as per above). • Public health and education institutions.

Housing Program	Purpose	Timeframe	Funding Model	Target Population
			Employment and Social Development Canada <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 58 designated communities. 	
10) Indigenous Community Support Fund	To help Indigenous communities and organizations prepare and respond to COVID-19.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created in 2020 through the Canada Economic Response Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs based funding applications to Indigenous Services Canada. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Indigenous communities and organizations.

Of these programs, four provide dedicated funding to support Indigenous homelessness, and only the On Reserve Shelter Enhancement Program identifies dedicated funding for on Reserve homelessness. The Family Violence Prevention Program provides support to shelters both on- and off-reserve. The Indigenous Community Support Fund, a COVID-19 response program operated through Indigenous Services Canada, provides supports to First Nations communities on and off reserve. Reaching Home – Indigenous Housing Stream provides support off reserve only, mainly in urban centres.

- Shelter Enhancement Program: on reserve only
- Family Violence Prevention Program: on and off reserve
- Indigenous Community Support Fund: on and off reserve.
- Reaching Home – Indigenous Housing Stream: off reserve

While other federal funding programs are not specific to First Nations, many of the programs have provided funding for Indigenous homelessness supports including several programs under the National Housing Strategy (NHS) such as the Co-Investment Fund, Innovation Fund, and the Rapid Housing Initiative.

The Co-Investment Fund, for example, has committed funding for 800 new units to support Indigenous peoples and 9,900 units to support the repair/renewal of Indigenous housing. This represents approximately 5.8% and 13.3% respectively of the total funding commitment. Similar funding allocations were not available for the Innovation Fund, although Indigenous organizations are eligible for the \$200+ million investment.

The Rapid Housing Initiative, as of March 2021, had committed 1,800 units for Indigenous peoples out of a total of 4,700 new affordable units; representing 38% of all new units.

Reaching Home has a total of \$413 million dedicated to address Indigenous homelessness predominantly in urban centres. This represents approximately 19.7% of the total Reaching Home funding (\$2.1 billion).

Where data is available, the Table below summarizes the various program funding allocations and Indigenous housing commitments. Of note, funding amounts are not homelessness specific for NHS programs.

Program	Total Funding Commitment	Program Status (March, 2021)	Indigenous Housing Funding
Co-Investment Fund (NHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$13.8 billion over ten years to create 60,000 new housing units and repair or renew \$240,000 housing units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$3.6 billion committed to support the creation of over 13,800 new units (9,500 affordable) and the repair/renewal of over 74,600 units (68,500 affordable). • Of the \$3.6 billion, over \$2.3 billion are loans and over \$1.3 billion are contributions/forgivable loans. • 4,700 units are conditional commitments and over 9,100 units are under construction or built. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 800 new units to support Indigenous People (5.8%). • 9,900 units to support Indigenous housing currently being repaired/renewed (13.3%).
Innovation Fund (NHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$200 million over 5 years to create 4,000 affordable housing units. • 2021 budget extends funding by \$600 million over 7 years to create an additional 12,700 affordable housing units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$207.9 million committed to support creation of 19,100 units (16,500 affordable). • 4,100 units are built or under construction. 	
Rapid Housing Initiative (NHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1 billion over 2 years to create up to 3,000 affordable housing units. • An additional \$1.5 billion over 2 years through Budget 2021 to create an additional 4,500 affordable housing units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1 billion committed to support creation of 4,700 new affordable units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1800 units for Indigenous Peoples (38%).

On-Reserve Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP) (NHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$31.7 million. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipients selected (June 2021) for the construction and ongoing operational support of 12 new shelters across Canada for Indigenous women, children, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people escaping family violence.
Reaching Home (NHS) ⁵²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2.1 billion over 9 years. • Additional \$400 million committed as a result of COVID-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,200 projects launched in first six months (launched in April 2019). • \$215 million expected to be delivered by 2021-2022 (not including COVID-19 investments). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$413 million is dedicated to address Indigenous Housing, predominantly in urban centres (19.7%). \$261 million through the Indigenous Homelessness Stream. \$152 million over nine years to be invested in priorities determined in collaboration with Indigenous partners.
Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) (ISC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual budget of \$39.3 million through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 329 First Nations communities are served by the ISC-funded shelters.
Indigenous Community Support Fund (ISC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formula based funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding announced April 2021. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base funding amount \$25,000 per community, and considers total population, remoteness, and Community Well-being Index Scores.

Although not specific to homelessness, overall, the National Housing Strategy (NHS) has committed investments totalling approximately \$1.45 million towards Indigenous housing, nearly 3% of the total NHS funding as of 2019, including:

⁵² Note: Reaching Home is only available off-reserve

- \$225 million to preserving and improving the condition of housing units for urban Indigenous families living in cities or urban centres,
- \$600 million over three years to support First Nations housing on reserve as part of a 10-year Housing Strategy (to be developed),
- \$638 million announced in 2019 for Indigenous Peoples living in urban, rural, and Northern communities (Canada, 2021).

As of 2019, the NHS was a 10-year \$53 billion plan with more recent announcements in 2020 making it a \$70+ billion plan.

An Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer news release earlier this year (2021) shows that the four explicit commitments related to off reserve Indigenous housing (Indigenous Community Housing, Co-Investment Fund, Reaching Home, and Distinctions-Based Indigenous Housing Strategies) within the National Housing Strategy account for \$1.8 billion of the \$55 billion federal strategy (or 3.3%).

Similar to the analysis above for the federal homelessness funding program, the amount of funding for NHS is very low considering the proportion of the homeless population and population with unmet housing needs that are Indigenous. Greater equity is needed in the funding allocations of such programs.

While it would have been useful to understand the state of First Nations' uptake of the federal programs to show whether the funds are reaching all First Nations or just those with capacity to develop good proposals on time, the available data does not enable us to conduct this analysis. The only programs where detailed allocation results have been found are for Reaching Home and the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ISC). For Reaching Home there is a list of all of the Indigenous Community Entities that administer funding. Indigenous Entities are often a Council, Network, or Friendship Centres, not necessarily a First Nation community. For the Community Support Fund all the recipients are available, but it may not always state specifically "First Nation". Also, to conduct this analysis it would require a comparison to First Nations who did not receive funding and then an attempt to analyze why/where the differences are.

PROVINCIAL PROGRAMS:

Eleven provincial housing programs providing support for Indigenous homelessness were identified based on a review of government websites and reports. They are described below. The listing does not include housing subsidies and grants or rental assistance that is not specific to homelessness. Some other funding is provided by provincial and territorial governments to address homelessness, but is not through a specific program. For example, the Yukon Government and Government of Nunavut fund emergency shelters, but this funding is not delivered through a specific program.

SUMMARY OF PROVINCIAL PROGRAMS

Province	Program	Purpose	Funding Model	Target
BC	Indigenous Housing Fund	To create new social housing units both on and off-reserve that target Indigenous	RFP process to BC Housing, longer-term funding.	Indigenous non-profit housing providers, First Nations, Metis Nation BC, non-profit and for-

Province	Program	Purpose	Funding Model	Target
		families, seniors, individuals, and persons with disabilities.	Ten- year program, starting 2018.	profit developers who want to partner with Indigenous organizations and First Nations.
BC	Rapid Response to Homelessness	To create over 2,000 modular supportive housing units across BC for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Open RFP process to BC Housing, funding over three years. Three-year funding, started 2017.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit housing providers with experience providing support.
BC	Community Housing Fund	To create affordable rental housing for middle and low-income families, independent seniors, and individuals. New projects must include mix of affordable housing, rent-geared-to-income housing and deep subsidy housing.	RFP process to BC Housing, longer-term funding, funding rounds in 2018 and 2020. Ten-year program, started 2018.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit organizations, housing co-operatives, and local government.
BC	Women's Transition Housing Fund	To provide 1,500 new transitional housing, safe homes, second-stage, and long-term housing units for women and their children who are at risk of violence or have experienced violence.	Expression of Interest (EOI) to BC Housing. Ten-year program, started 2018.	Non-profit providers who specialize in housing and supports for women and children who are experiencing or at risk of violence.
MB	Emergency Shelter Assistance	To support needs of homeless shelters through the COVID-19 pandemic.	Allocations from Province to providers. COVID-19 response.	Existing shelter providers.
MB	Support Service Program	To support 250 individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to secure and maintain short-term or long-term housing. Funding will provide wrap-around services.	RFP process through Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association. Two-year funding, started 2021.	Community partners.
ON	Community Homelessness	To prevent and end homelessness by	Allocations by province (Ministry	Service Managers

Province	Program	Purpose	Funding Model	Target
	Prevention Initiative	improving access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing and homelessness services for people experiencing homelessness and for people at-risk of homelessness.	of Housing) to Service Managers. Service Managers allocate funding based on local need and funding processes. Initiated in 2013, updated 2017.	
ON	Indigenous Supportive Housing Program	Designed to be administered by Indigenous organizations for Indigenous people in need of housing and support services. Funding is targeted at new construction, rehabilitation of affordable housing.	RFP process to Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services. Began in 2017 – part of ON Supportive Housing Investment, part of Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS).	Indigenous for-profit and Indigenous non-profit organizations.
ON	Home for Good	To assist people who are homeless to secure and maintain housing. The program targets people who are chronically homeless, youth, Indigenous people who are homeless, and/or people living in institutional care at risk of homelessness.	Funding allocation from province. Transfer payment agreement and Take Up Plan required to Ministry of Housing. Capital and operating component. Began in 2017 – part of LTAHS.	Service Managers
ON	Social Services Relief Fund	To support shelters, create longer-term housing solutions and help vulnerable Ontarians affected by COVID-19 including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Funding allocation from province, administered through CHPI program. Began in 2020, part of COVID-19, new funding announced in 2021.	Service Managers Indigenous program partners: Miziwe Biik Development Corporation and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services.
NS	Shelter Enhancement	To improve existing shelter for women, children, and youth who have experienced family	One-time funding through forgivable loan.	Non-profit corporations and charities.

Province	Program	Purpose	Funding Model	Target
		violence. To help acquire and build new shelters and second stage housing where needed.	Initiated in 2017, renewed in 2020.	
QC	Shelter Improvement Program	To help non-profit organizations providing shelter for victims of family violence with repairs/upgrades.	Program registration is through the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) and then forwarded to Société d'habitation du Québec.	Non-profit organizations providing temporary shelter for victims of family violence and youth aged 28 and under who are victims of domestic violence.
QC	Emergency Rent Supplement and Municipal Subsidy Program	To provide temporary emergency assistance to households who find themselves homeless due to a shortage of rental housing. Eligible households include low-income households that are or will soon become homeless.	Tenant application to housing office, Société d'habitation du Québec.	2 Streams: application by household or by Municipality in the case of a major disaster.
AB	Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)	To support preventative social service programs in communities.	An 80/20 funding partnership between the Government of Alberta and participating municipalities or Métis settlements.	Municipalities and Métis settlements.
SK	Shelter Enhancement Program	To help build new or repair existing emergency shelters and second stage housing for victims of family violence so that projects meet health, safety and security standards.	Application to Saskatchewan Housing Corporation.	Non-profit corporation, First Nation group or charity whose objective it is to operate housing for victims of violence. Must be off-reserve.
NB	Shelter Enhancement Program	To maintain and improve emergency shelters and second stage housing units for women and children or	Application to Social Development Office.	Non-profit organizations and charities.

Province	Program	Purpose	Funding Model	Target
		youth who are victims of family violence.		
NB	Rural and Native/Basic Shelter Rental Program	To assist households in need obtain affordable, adequate and suitable rental housing in rural communities.	Application to Social Development Office	Off-reserve Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in rural communities with a population of less than 2,500 residents.
NL	Provincial Housing and Homelessness Fund	To leverage partnerships and strengthen capacity of community housing sector to provide housing options to low-income households. The fund targets supports to women and children fleeing domestic violence, Indigenous peoples, seniors, young adults, persons with disabilities, persons experiencing mental health and addictions issues, and persons experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness.	Funding application to Newfoundland Labrador Housing through Capital Contributions Stream or Creative and Innovative Stream. Maximum one-time funding of \$250,000. New funding announced in May 2021.	Indigenous and non-profit organizations, and municipalities.

Overall, there are limited provincial programs aimed specifically at supporting individuals experiencing homelessness. Some programs such as the BC Community Housing Fund and the NL Provincial Housing and Homelessness, while they include people at-risk of homelessness are more generally focused at providing housing for low-income and vulnerable households. Several programs are also aimed at shelter enhancements (MB, NB, NS, SK, QC). Programs such as BC’s Rapid Response to Homelessness, Ontario’s Community Homelessness Prevention Program and Home for Good, and Manitoba’s Support Service Program are more directly providing support to assist people who are experiencing homelessness.

Provincial programs dedicated to providing supports for Indigenous homelessness were identified in just two provinces: British Columbia and Ontario.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia, there are a total of eight programs relevant to homelessness that are all part of a 10-year \$7 billion investment in housing that the BC Government made in 2018. Two of these programs provide targeted supports for Indigenous homelessness.

- Indigenous Housing Fund
- Community Housing Fund

The Indigenous Housing Fund is the only program that is targeted only to Indigenous households. The Fund has a commitment of \$550 million over 10 years for 1,750 new units of social housing for Indigenous peoples both on and off reserve. This represents almost 8% of the total 10-year funding commitment. As of May, 2019, based on the first selection process, more than 1,100 homes in 26 communities were announced (BC, 2019). This includes approximately 780 off reserve homes and nearly 270 homes on reserve.

An announcement earlier this year (June, 2021) stated that a total of 49 new projects have been selected through the province's Community Housing Fund to create approximately 2,474 rental homes for individuals, families, seniors, people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples throughout the province. More than 1,000 of the new homes will be for Indigenous individuals, families, and Elders.

BC is the only province to invest provincial housing funds into on reserve housing.

ONTARIO

Ontario has four programs aimed at supporting people experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness:

- Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)
- Indigenous Supportive Housing Program (ISHP)
- Home for Good (HFG)
- Social Services Relief Fund.

For 2020-2021, the province's spending on its three core homelessness programs (CHPI, HFG, ISHP) was approximately \$424 million; \$339 million on CHPI (80%), \$56 million on HFG (13%), and \$29 million on ISHP (7%) (FAO, 2021).

The Indigenous Supportive Housing Fund (ISHP) is the only program specifically targeted towards Indigenous households, yet not specifically for homelessness. This program is specifically designed to be administered by Indigenous organizations for Indigenous people in need of housing and support services. ISHP Capital Funding for 2019-2020 was aimed at supporting the development of 35 housing units over 20-year period. ISHP spending when it began in 2017 was \$2 million, increasing to \$16 million in 2018-2016, \$13 million in 2019-2020, and \$29 million for 2020-2021.

Through the Ontario Home for Good program, four priority areas are identified including Indigenous peoples. This program was a \$180 million investment over three years as part of the province's goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025.

Ontario's Shelter Services Relief Fund, a COVID-19 response program to support shelters, is a \$510 million investment including approximately \$241 million to support Ontarians affected by COVID-19 including those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Additional funds will be used to create or renovate more than 1,500 housing units and expand rent support programs. Funding is provided directly to municipalities and Indigenous community partners (Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services and Miziwe Biik). Of the \$241 million funding, \$3.7 million was allocated to the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services and \$380,000 was allocated to Miziwe Biik Development Corporation,

representing approximately 1.7%⁵³. Of the total \$510 million investment, over \$19.5 million was provided to Ontario Aboriginal housing Services (Ontario, 2021). This represents approximately 3.8% of the funding commitment.

PROGRAM DELIVERY AND APPLICATION PROCESSES:

Almost all of the funding programs are delivered through an application process to the federal or provincial government, with the notable exception of the federal government's Reaching Home program, where funding is distributed through a Community Entity which has an agreement with the federal government. Indigenous organizations are given priority to act as the Community Entity for the Indigenous Homelessness funding stream. Community Entities responsible for delivering the Indigenous Homelessness stream are required to submit an investment plan to outline their investment priorities supported through Reaching Home over the full program cycle. They are encouraged, but not required, to develop a full community plan. Community Entities responsible for delivering the Designated Communities stream are required to have a community plan in place that covers the full program cycle. Community plans include: an investment plan for funding, a description of the coordinated access system in place or strategy to implement coordinated access, the outcomes the community expects to report, and details on the stakeholders consulted during the development of the community plan, including Indigenous service providers and the Indigenous Community Entity where the Indigenous Homelessness and Designated Communities streams co-exist.

The Reaching Home program has used a pan-Indigenous approach to ensure service to all First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. The involvement of First Nations governments and their delegated entities has been minimal if not non-existent to date due to their lack of capacity. However, that current dynamic is changing as the Federal Government strengthens its relationship with First Nations including increased capacity for First Nations to provide services to their citizens living in urban centres. The change in dynamics will provide a growing presence and voice to First Nations in the solutions to First Nations homelessness.

⁵³ Approved Planning Allocations under Social Services Relief Fund Phase 2:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.news.ontario.ca/mma/en/learnmore/ontario_helps_protect_most_vulnerable_people_across_the_province/approved_planning_allocations_under_social_services_relief_fund_phase_2.pdf

5. Improving Service Delivery

Homelessness is a highly complex social problem that has prompted a variety of services over the years. Historically, homelessness services were designed for white adult males⁵⁴. Since the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, more emphasis has been placed on developing and implementing services that respond to the needs of Indigenous people⁵⁵.

Approaches used for the broader Canadian population, such as Housing First and coordinated access, are being modified to better meet the needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness. Importantly, the need for flexibility and localizing these models to meet local First Nations community needs are critical. A key element to achieving a localized model is for local First Nations leaders and knowledge keepers to lead, or at a minimum be engaged in the co-creation of the approach/model while being based on a relationship of trust and inclusiveness along the way. The findings also point to the need for the model to adapt and be flexible to identified local needs, for example looking at intake processes and assessment tools to ensure they are not re-traumatizing individuals. Connecting history and cultural practices is also vital, such as incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the model's core principles and connecting with Elders and sharing circles. The finding also shows that more work often remains to be done to ensure services are specifically informed by First Nations perspectives and respect First Nations self-determination.

This report focuses on six types of services and structures. Each of these types of services and structures have been evaluated, or at a minimum, research identified consideration that have been put forward to support the services being informed by First Nations or a pan-Indigenous perspective. These six types of services and structures are:

- Systems Planning Organization and Governance Structure
- Coordinated Access
- Housing First
- Harm Reduction
- Case Management
- Other Programs

For all types of services there is a lack of information informed from a First Nation's specific perspective. In general, the information found is pan-Indigenous. One of the reasons for the pan-Indigenous approach is to ensure equal services to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit. The lack of First Nations specific information may also be because to date First Nations organizations have typically not been involved in serving First Nations members experiencing homelessness who are living off-reserve. Most Indigenous organizations in the homelessness service system serve First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

⁵⁴ Homeless Hub, Racialized Communities, accessed at: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/racialized-communities>

⁵⁵ For Example, Jessie Thistle and Janet Smylie wrote an article entitled *Pekiwewin* (coming home): advancing good relations with Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, which references the calls to action of the TRC and the need to develop clinical practice guidelines for people experiencing homelessness that are lead by First Nation, Métis and Inuit people.

System Planning, Organization and Governance Structure

System planning has been used as a method of organizing and delivering services, housing, and programs that co-ordinates diverse resources to ensure that efforts align with homelessness-reduction goals. System planning requires a way thinking that recognizes the basic components of a system and understands how these relate to one another, as well as their basic function as part of the whole.

Among the key elements that should be considered in operationalizing system-planning approaches is organization and governance structure. Organization refers to infrastructure that can serve as the backbone in co-ordinating the homeless-serving system to meeting common goals. The governance structure refers to how people in authoritative positions hold the homeless-serving system accountable to meeting common goals.

Government funders are increasingly requiring communities to use system planning approaches to address homelessness and establish appropriate organizational infrastructure and governance structures to support effective planning and service delivery. The federal government requires communities receiving Reaching Home funding to engage in system planning and establish appropriate organization and governance structures. The province of Ontario requires municipalities that have been designated as service system managers for housing and homelessness to conduct homelessness system planning. Likewise, national coalitions aimed at addressing homelessness, such as A Way Home Canada, are also encouraging community/systems planning.

All the resources identified that outline opportunities to improve homelessness system planning and organizational infrastructure and governance structures take a pan-Indigenous approach, and all are all from the perspective of mainstream stakeholders attempting to taking a more inclusive approach to community planning and service system governance by engaging and involving Indigenous people. None come directly from a First Nations perspective.

Given the absence of information from a First Nation's perspective, the following section presents information from the perspective of mainstream stakeholders attempting to taking a more inclusive approach to community planning and service system governance by involving Indigenous stakeholders. Materials from a First Nations perspective would be beneficial to identify effective approaches to First Nations homelessness system planning, organization and governance.

As part of Ontario service managers' system planning work, they are required to "engage with Indigenous organizations and communities – including First Nation, Métis, Inuit organizations and communities, where present in the service area, and commit to coordination and collaboration with Indigenous housing providers and service providers to support access to culturally appropriate housing and homelessness services for Indigenous peoples"⁵⁶.

Reaching Home has provided communities with a guide to system planning and governance provides a number of considerations for choosing a systems planning organization and governance structure.

Among the considerations are:

- whether there is capacity for cultural awareness and engagement with Indigenous communities

⁵⁶ Ontario Ministry of Housing, Policy Statement: Service Manager Housing and Homelessness Plans, accessed at: <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=15090>

- whether there are Indigenous staff hired as part of the social planning organization
- whether any Indigenous staff are connected to Indigenous-run agencies for support in their work

In identifying the type of system planning organization, the guide states that one of the pros to having the system planning and governance organization as a standalone organization is the opportunity for greater Indigenous leadership and community coordination. Whereas, if the organization is a branch of an existing organization or a municipality, there may be concern that the organization will not be Indigenous-led.

Reaching Home has also produced a Reference Guide to support Community Homelessness Reports. The Guide identifies a number of “best practices” related to engagement and collaboration with Indigenous organizations. These include:

- Developing an understanding and awareness of local Indigenous cultures, perspectives and community priorities to support cultural competency and awareness capacity for those initiating engagement;
- Providing as much advanced notice as possible to local Indigenous leadership on meetings taking place and seeking their advice on the structure and content of the discussions;
- Identifying and co-developing approaches for supporting participation in discussions, recognizing local traditions, customs and preferences;
- Establishing communication practices such as reoccurring meetings and points of contact for communications; and,
- Co-development of processes or procedures for how information gathered from discussions will be used, validated and followed-up on by organizations.

A Way Home Canada is a national collation reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice. A Way Home’s *Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit* provides a number of considerations for engaging Indigenous people in community planning. The considerations are based on communities such as Winnipeg and Yellowknife that have recently engaged in this work. The toolkit notes that:

- Many youth in urban areas have come from rural and remote areas and the engagement process must be broadened to include the region
- On-reserve First Nations people may see rural and urban paces as an extension of their traditional territories and therefore mainstream organizations can’t assume they are assisting ‘migrant’ First Nations youth
- Mainstream organizations must be cognizant that the paradigms of youth-serving agencies remain grounded in Western post-colonial legislation and policy, and organizations addressing youth homelessness are not necessarily aligned with Indigenous infrastructures’ relations with governments economic development and on and off-reserve and urban reserve development.

The Toolkit outlines a number of Indigenous engagement strategies, including:

- Inform Indigenous communities about the youth plan
- Partner with local Indigenous organizations
- Include Indigenous community leaders in your planning committee
- Ensure Indigenous feedback
- Plan content that addresses Indigenous homelessness specifically
- Ensure no harm to Indigenous communities
- Share plan with local Indigenous communities

- Partner with Indigenous communities to improve media coverage.

Coordinated Access

Coordinated access is a community-wide system that streamlines the process for people experiencing homelessness to access housing and support services needed to end their homelessness. “By standardizing the intake and assessment process, sharing information in real-time within a community, adopting uniform prioritization policies and coordinating referral processes, coordinated access systems connect people to the right housing and supports as efficiently as possible based on their preferences and level of need”⁵⁷.

Reaching Home requires Designated Communities to implement a coordinated access system (by March 2022). Designated Communities are also required to report on Indigenous homelessness. Research by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) looked at how coordinated access systems address the unique strengths and needs of Indigenous individuals and families experiencing homelessness. This analysis takes a pan-Indigenous approach. No First Nations-specific analysis of coordinated access systems was found, pointing to the need for further work going forward.

Given the lack of First Nations-specific analysis, findings from the pan-Indigenous research by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness are outlined below.

Barriers and challenges:

- Racism and lack of safety in the current mainstream system are concerns, and some Indigenous individuals will choose to be on the street due to these concerns.
- Lack of affordable housing.
- Lack of engagement with Indigenous experts and leadership.
- Fear over how data is being used, now and in the future.

Where relationships need to be strengthened and partnerships developed:

- Co-create and lead coordinated access with Indigenous leadership.
- Engage with local Indigenous experts to contextualize local issues.
- Establish clear engagement guidelines between Designated Communities and Indigenous Community Entities⁵⁸.
- Work with other systems (child welfare, mental health, criminal justice, and hospital systems) as part of coordinated access.

⁵⁷ Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2018). What is Coordinated Access. Website. Found at: <http://caeh.ca/cas/>

⁵⁸ Designated communities include urban centres, Indigenous communities, territorial communities, and rural and remote communities across Canada. Designated communities are allocated funding through the Reaching Home program as part of the National Housing Strategy. An Indigenous Community Entity is where the Indigenous Homelessness and Designated Community streams co-exist. A Community Entity is responsible for the development and implementation of the community homelessness plan.

- Engage in ceremony when developing coordinated access systems.
- Acknowledge and address racism.

Capacity needs to effectively deliver programs and services:

- Cultural competency training for mainstream agencies.
- Adequate resources for Indigenous communities to develop data collection and analysis policies.

Opportunities to improve services:

- Include an Indigenous agency as an access point for coordinated access.
- Increase representation of Indigenous staff in mainstream organizations.
- Ensure intake processes are conversational; rigid assessment tools are not appropriate.
- Co-create benchmarks, data-requirements, and collection tools with Indigenous experts.
- Collect qualitative data.
- Complete assessments using a trauma-informed approach. Use a strength-based assessment tool.
- Build relationships and trust among Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous organizations.

Housing First

Housing First is a homelessness assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness.⁵⁹ Housing First is guided by the notion that people need the basic necessities such as food and a safe place before being able addressing other needs such as employment and mental health. Housing First is further guided by the belief that client choice is valuable in housing selection and support service participation.

Many cities across Canada are taking a Housing First approach to support plans to end homelessness. Several cities are also examining ways of localizing Housing First programs to support First Nations and other Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. This review is largely based on the Winnipeg At Home Chez Soi (AHCS) project, and incorporates learnings from Hamilton, North Bay and Edmonton. The existing research on Housing First programs takes a pan-Indigenous approach and does not identify First Nations-specific findings.

Existing research and examples from communities highlight strengths of the Housing First model in addressing homelessness yet emphasize the need for a localized approach. A core awareness emphasized by the Institute of Urban Studies is that “to understand pathways into homelessness for Indigenous people, it is necessary to understand that it occurs within the context of colonial and cultural trauma, compounded by income inequality and racism in a housing market already suffering from a shortage of affordable housing” (Distasio et. al, 2018, 9).

⁵⁹ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016). Fact Sheet: Housing First. Found at: <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf>

Localized Approaches to Ending Homelessness: Indigenizing Housing First, research out of the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg, is aimed at providing a guide for implementing and delivering Housing First in Indigenous community contexts. Importantly, the authors recognize that there is no complete answer. The research draws on the experiences of the Winnipeg Site of the At Home/Chez Soi (AHCS) project. The report builds on the experiences of 68 representatives from

Housing First must not be seen as a program but as a feeling—to care, understand, support, protect, and shelter those who are temporarily vulnerable and in need, and to face the journey together with confidence and bravery. (Distasio et al., 2019)

communities that have launched Housing First.

Findings from the above research and learnings from existing programs are described further below.

Barriers and challenges:

- Focus on Western view of independence; lack of recognition of family, and social and spiritual connections in ‘housing’.
- Indigenous organizations are often underfunded, not having the same capacity as non-Indigenous organizations.
- Lack of affordable housing and housing with supports.
- Sustaining Housing First is challenging as it relies on the local funding context; lack of resources can cause disruption.
- Concerns that assessment tools can re-traumatize people and do not take a holistic approach in asking questions (i.e., focus on the challenges and not positive aspects in a person’s life).
- Tenancies can have challenges resulting from discrimination, and difficulties observing traditional practices.
- Racism.

Promising practices:

- The Winnipeg model included Indigenous community members and others in co-sharing the management. This model was also aimed at achieving consensus, “ensuring voices of stakeholders are heard, considered, and acted upon” (Distasio et al., 2019, 14). Initial tensions and mistrust provided an important building block for developing and defining the model (CAEH, 2021).

Where relationships need to be strengthened and partnerships developed:

- Building relationships with Indigenous communities and First Nations and co-developing programs.
 - In Winnipeg, Housing First through AHCS was deeply rooted in partnerships with the Indigenous community including Indigenous community members, health practitioners, academic members and government, and collaboration with Elders, traditional teachers, those with lived experience of mental health and homelessness, and Indigenous community organizations (Distasio, et al., 2018).

- In Edmonton, the work of Homeward Trust, a service provider and overseer of funded housing and homelessness projects, is guided by a Housing First approach. As part of their approach in meeting local needs, they emphasize an inclusive governance structure with four out of nine Directors from within Indigenous communities chosen by community Indigenous stakeholders, and they are informed by an *Indigenous Advisory Council (AAC)* comprised of community leaders.
- Building relationships with entire homelessness-serving sector and the wider community.

Those things take time...It's like any relationship that you have with anybody. You have to invest yourself in it. You have to be prepared to be real, and be humble, and take your time.
(Distasio et al., 2019)

Capacity needs to effectively deliver programs and services:

- Having Indigenous people in leadership and management positions within service organizations.
- Honouring local knowledge holders.
- Ensuring all decision-makers are culturally informed.
- Providing supports to staff and time and space for self-care.
- Orientation and training related to diversity and cultural education.
- Incorporating social enterprise.
- Ensuring adequate funding to address lack of affordable housing.

Opportunities to improve services:

- Housing First should be centered on understanding the local population experiencing homelessness. Moreover, Indigenous persons experiencing homelessness need to be supported by the Indigenous community and “supports are best provided from a full understanding of the impact history has and continues to play in acknowledging the person as a whole being.” (Distasio et al., 2019, 31)
- Providing trauma-informed care and using a strengths-based framework.
 - Intake completed at Suswin, in North Bay, is done through conversation with little interruption for guiding.
- Ensuring outreach staff are well known and trusted.
- Incorporating relationship and trust building into Housing First model.
- Incorporating ceremonies and teachings and promoting connection to community.
 - Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY) in Winnipeg incorporates Indigenous teachings into regular youth services such as housing and mental health, providing cultural counselling, opportunities to participate in ceremonies, and receiving a spirit name and providing traditional medicines for strength.
 - The Indigenous Cultural Helper Program at Homeward Trust in Edmonton started in 2017 to facilitate and support a (re)connection to cultural practices.
 - Connecting with community and incorporating cultural values.
 - Endaayaang Housing First Youth Project developed a model (a wheel) incorporating Housing First For Youth (HF4Y) core principles with the Circle of Courage

Framework, Seven Grandfather Teachings, and Medicine Wheel. All areas of the wheel are surrounded by connecting with community.

- Other examples include connecting through Elders, sharing circles, and with peers/people with lived experience.

Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction is an evidence-based, client-centred approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with addiction and substance use, without necessarily requiring people who use substances from abstaining or stopping⁶⁰.

A report by the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development looks at harm reduction through the lens of Indigenous communities. As with the other program research found, this report takes a pan-Indigenous approach. The report states that while mainstream practices such as naloxone distribution, safe consumption sites, and opioid substitution therapies are helpful, Indigenous harm reduction means reducing the harms of colonialism. Moreover, that the focus cannot be on the 'drugs' alone, but rather needs to be addressed in a holistic, culturally informed, trauma informed and community driven way. The research points to an over representation of Indigenous people losing their lives to the opioid crisis and higher rates of HCV and HIV.

Opportunities to improve services:

- Policies and programs need to be led by Indigenous people and communities and include people with lived experience.
- Engaging peers (i.e., people with lived experience) in leadership roles.
- Programs need to treat the whole person in the context of their families, communities, and Nations.
- Greater funding for community-based programs and explicit funding for peer-led and culturally-grounded initiatives.

Case Management

Case management refers to a collaborative and planned approach to ensuring that a person who experiences homelessness gets the services and supports that they need to move forward with their lives⁶¹.

Research found on case management was also pan-Indigenous. A *Summary of Indigenous Housing & Case Management Engagement Strategies* prepared with the Indigenous Health, Housing and Homelessness Collaborative in Calgary offers a number of strategies regarding Indigenous housing and case management practices. A core element is promoting case management practices that are rooted in approaches that are inclusive and equitable and that take a person-centred approach to care. Other elements include facilitating access to Knowledge Keepers and Elders, providing opportunities for people to connect/re-connect with their culture.

⁶⁰ Thomas, G. (2005) *Harm Reduction Policies and Programs Involved for Persons Involved in the Criminal Justice System*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Use.

⁶¹ Homeless Hub. Solutions: Supporting communities to prevent and end homelessness.
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/supports/case-management>

Several housing and support service programs are currently being implemented but have not yet been evaluated to measure outcomes. The following are key findings based on available information and descriptions of the programs by the provider/operators. A key commonality of the programs described below is the application of a Housing First approach in supporting Indigenous people to find and maintain housing, with the intent of transitioning participants to permanent housing and more independent living. In addition to the supports provided to find housing, each organization offers a range of services to better support participants. A couple of organizations included below also have specific youth housing programs.

Other Service Examples

Data is not available on their success, but the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg's A Place to Call Home program, Homeward Bound's Aboriginal Health Centre (De dwa da dehs nye>s), and RainCity Housing's Indigenous Cultural Services are other types of service aimed at addressing Indigenous homelessness that are informed by a First Nations perspective.

Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg's A Place to Call Home Program

The purpose of A Place to Call Home is to connect participants to permanent housing. It uses an intensive case management approach that provides services for chronically and episodically homeless urban Indigenous people. Services include home visits, counselling, supports to obtain primary care, teaching and sharing circles, Elder and traditional services, advocacy and referral services, literacy and education, employment, life skills, food skills, drop-in and individualized case plans. The program is based on AHWC's Medicine Wheel approach. The program is customized, cultural-based and participant driven.

Homeward Bound's Aboriginal Health Centre (De dwa da dehs nye>s)

Homeward Bound's Aboriginal Health Centre supports chronically and episodically homeless Indigenous people secure a home. Once the person/family is housed, connections are made to community agencies and supports are provided to prevent future homelessness. Physical and mental health assessments are completed to refer the participants to appropriate agencies. A support team offers wraparound care and assistance is provided to get the participant involved in the community. An income is required to access housing.

Indigenous Cultural Services within Non-Indigenous Housing Organization

While data is not available on its success, RainCity Housing's Indigenous Cultural Services is included as another type of service aimed at supporting Indigenous tenants and staff. The intent of program is to acknowledge unique history and service needs of Indigenous tenants and staff and make space for cultural learning and knowledge beyond tokenism.

RainCity (Vancouver) is a non-profit organization that provides a range of housing and support services. While RainCity is a non-Indigenous organization, Indigenous Cultural Services are offered to meet the unique needs of their Indigenous tenants and staff. The purpose of Indigenous Cultural Services is to build, establish and continue relationships with Host Nations of the Coast Salish and diverse Nations across the province and Turtle Island. It also supports Indigenous staff and implements

recommendations of the cultural safety working group. Indigenous Cultural Services works closely with other program managers to train non-Indigenous staff, stakeholders and service programs. It also assists in the integration of cultural supports and Indigenous programming.

Insights that are not Program Specific:

Several community-based plans were reviewed to identify strategies, approaches and current models that had been developed to support Indigenous people in accessing services and housing. None of the community-based plans reviewed included recommendations to address the specific needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The purpose of many of the community-based plans are to address Indigenous homelessness broadly.

The following describes key highlights that were identified through the plans related to promising practices: barriers and challenges within program and service delivery; where relationships need to be strengthened and partnerships developed; capacity needs, and opportunities to improve services.

Barriers and challenges:

- Design, implementation, and delivery of Coordinated Access Systems are not necessarily meeting the needs of Indigenous communities
- Only “Status Indians” are covered under the Indian Act. Non-Status, Metis, Inuit and Bill C-31 people, therefore, are not covered under the Act which causes jurisdictional issues, impacting the coordination of service delivery
- Some communities, such as Halton Region in Ontario, may have residents identifying as First Nations, but no Indigenous organizations currently operating and providing services for First Nations people
- Indigenous people often experience discrimination when trying to access services and housing
- Lack of safe spaces and service gaps (dedicated Indigenous housing, housing search assistance, supportive services to help retain housing, assistance with first and last month’s rent, and information on other community services) for Indigenous people

Where relationships need to be strengthened and partnerships developed:

- Continue “to build relationships and trust with Indigenous community partners and make intentional and transformative steps in response to the Reconciliation Calls to Action.” (City of Hamilton)
- Develop formal relationships between municipalities and Local First Nations
- Actively engage and include First Nations on Indigenous homelessness and housing issues and initiatives
- Develop specialized agreements and partnerships with education and training institutes to implement education, employment, mentoring programs
- Create statements of accountability for the organization, staff members, Indigenous organization, etc., which the City of Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division and Indigenous organizations did to support the relationship-building process
- Strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers so that non-Indigenous organizations are better informed and better able to provide culturally appropriate supports

Capacity needs to effectively deliver programs and services:

- Allocate funding to be disbursed directly to Indigenous organizations (Hamilton allocated 20% of its Reaching Home program funding to be distributed to the Indigenous community for self-determination in program funding allocation)
- Reserve a specific number of units for only Indigenous individuals and family units
- Include Indigenous people on local housing and homelessness boards (for example, in Calgary, two members are required, one from reserve and one off-reserve member)
- Increase Indigenous staff levels, in particular with front-line workers and managers that work directly with the homeless and at-risk populations (Calgary)
- Develop modular training (awareness, cross-cultural training, sensitivity training, education, etc.) for housing and service providers, shelter staff and general public
- Create working groups/committees to develop and provide culturally appropriate services
- Develop a data strategy to ensure data collected from Indigenous people are owned and protected by Indigenous organizations

Opportunities to improve services

- Support funding applications that intend to Indigenize coordinated access practices led by Indigenous community partners (City of Hamilton)
- Commit to placing Indigenous people on the Coordinated Housing Access Table priority list in housing and housing service vacancies
 - City of Thunder Bay committed to a 2:1 ratio to address the high rate of Indigenous people who are homeless, which means that for every three people referred to housing services and supports, two will be Indigenous. The City's target is to reduce Indigenous homelessness by 50% by 2027/2028
- Develop two distinct reports; one that includes the full population and one Indigenous only, to better measure and report on reducing both Indigenous homelessness and homelessness overall
- Develop an assessment tool that can reflect the unique needs and experiences of Indigenous people
- Include Elders and Indigenous resource people in the planning and implementation of Housing First approaches
- Implement education for landlords to discuss expectations related to Indigenous family structures
- Involve Indigenous stakeholders in the analysis and interpretation of data about Indigenous homeless and at-risk populations
- Develop client-centred strategies that are unique to the individual/family and based on choice
- Apply the Two-Eyed Seeing approach (Halton) to research and knowledge development
- Engage Indigenous peoples and organizations in decision-making
- Increase access to land and cultural opportunities
- Supports and services should be Indigenous-led and culturally appropriate
- Increase family healing supports that are inclusive of all family members and extended families
- Hire more Indigenous support workers to do outreach and/or establish a cultural-based outreach programming
- Implement culturally safe discharge, referral and warm transfer processes for agencies

6. Conclusions

The scan identified key gaps in quantitative data related to First Nations homelessness.

- Some of the Census data on households in housing need is only available publicly for Indigenous people as a whole, rather than being First Nations specific
- Limited data on the extent of First Nations homelessness, and in particular, the extent of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness, homelessness on reserve, and First Nations specific data on people experiencing homelessness off reserve, rather than Indigenous people as a whole
- Limited data on the characteristics of First Nations people experiencing homelessness, and whether and how homelessness disproportionately affects particular population groups, such as 2SLGBTQQIA+, First Nations youth, First Nations women, First Nations adults, and First Nations seniors
- Limited data on what forms of homelessness are most pervasive among First Nations people across the country or in different parts of the country and how experiences (forms, durations and frequencies of homelessness) differ across population groups.

Despite these gaps, the scan compiled the most comprehensive data available on First Nations homelessness, and identified and confirmed key insights about First Nations experiences of homelessness:

- Colonization and ongoing marginalization of First Nations people are widely recognized as the primary causes of First Nations homelessness. Colonial policies and practices have resulted in disparities between First Nations populations and non-Indigenous people in many areas of life that contribute to contemporary experiences of First Nations homelessness. These include: lower levels of education; poorer health; higher rates of unemployment; lower income levels; greater proportion of income from government transfers; higher rates of poverty; higher likelihoods of having a disability; higher levels of sexual violence and violence against women, including high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women; greater likelihood of being a victim of a violent crime; high rates of placement within the child welfare system; high incarceration rates, and increased risk of homelessness following incarceration; higher rates of discrimination in the housing market and in employment; and more households in core housing need.
- First Nations people are over-represented among the homeless population, particularly in the Prairies, where 68.0% of shelter users are Indigenous compared to 10.4% of the total population.
- Based on available data, it is estimated that the minimum number of First Nations people experiencing homelessness at any given time in Canada is 9,191, but this is certainly an underestimate given the limitations in available data, including in the number of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness and homelessness on reserve.
- First Nations shelter users have shorter stays than non-Indigenous shelter users, but this is not necessarily a positive outcome, as analysis indicated that their stays are less likely to end because of finding housing, even when controlling for other confounding factors. This indicates that First Nations people face barriers in finding housing.

The scan identified the following key insights related to funding programs:

- Most Indigenous funding programs are not delivered through governance structures that respect First Nations self-determination. Almost all of the funding programs are delivered through an application process to the federal or provincial government, with the notable exception of the federal government's Reaching Home program, where funding is distributed through a Community Entity which has an agreement with the federal government. Indigenous organizations are given priority to act as the Community Entity for the Indigenous Homelessness funding stream.
- Funding for Indigenous homelessness is low compared to the proportion of the homeless population and population with unmet housing needs who are Indigenous.
- There are regional disparities in the availability of funding to address homelessness across the country. Provincial programs dedicated to providing supports dedicated to Indigenous homelessness were identified in just two provinces: British Columbia and Ontario.
- Limited funding for homelessness is available on reserve. Most provincial programs are only available off reserve, with the notable exception of British Columbia's Indigenous Housing Fund.

The scan identified the following key insights related to services aimed at addressing First Nations homelessness:

- Approaches used for the broader Canadian population, such as Housing First and coordinated access, are being modified to better meet the needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness; however, more work often remains to be done to ensure services are specifically informed by First Nations perspectives and respect First Nations self-determination.
- Funding programs should allow for flexibility to adapt these models to meet local First Nations community needs, for example making adaptations to the intake process and assessment tools to ensure they are not re-traumatizing individuals.
- Connecting cultural teachings and practices is also important, such as incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the model's core principles and connecting with Elders and incorporating sharing circles.
- The research found that existing analysis of services aimed at addressing First Nations homelessness typically takes a pan-Indigenous approach, possibly because urban Indigenous organizations providing housing and homelessness services typically serve First Nations, Metis and Inuit. Further work is needed to determine opportunities to improve services from a First Nations-specific perspective.
- The pan-Indigenous research found that a key element to achieving a localized model is for local Indigenous leaders and knowledge keepers to lead, or at a minimum be engaged in the co-creation of the approach/model based on a relationship of trust and inclusiveness. However, from a First Nation perspective, a key element would be for First Nation leaders and knowledge keepers to lead or be engaged in the co-creation of the approach/model.

6. Draft Recommendations

The following 13 recommendations have been developed to improve delivery of programs and services to First Nations people experiencing homelessness based on the findings of the environmental scan. Further input and advice should be gathered in Phase 2 from regional organizations, experts, First Nations leaders and others on ways and means to improve the programs and services related to the reduction or elimination of First Nations homelessness.

1. Governments and mainstream organizations should increase their sharing of research data with First Nations organizations. This includes existing research conducted by ESDC, such as its Indigenous Homelessness Study and its analysis of the 2018 nationally coordinated Point-in-Time Count. The sharing of regionally and nationally consolidated data is critical, because the population of First Nations people experiencing homelessness may not be large enough to allow for detailed community level reporting and generalization in some communities.
2. Research should be conducted by First Nations organizations or in partnership with First Nations/Indigenous organizations to ensure the research reflects the interests and concerns of First Nations organizations and survey tools are culturally appropriate for First Nations people experiencing homelessness.
3. Research findings should report on First Nations specifically, where possible, as opposed to Indigenous people as a whole to increase knowledge of the specific needs of First Nations people experiencing homelessness.
4. Additional research on the extent of First Nations people experiencing hidden homelessness and homelessness on reserve should be undertaken.
5. Governments should increase First Nations control and care over housing by increasing the funding programs that are delivered through governance structures that respect First Nations self-determination. The federal Reaching Home program's Indigenous Homelessness stream is one interim step towards respecting First Nations self-determination: an Indigenous organization is responsible for community allocation of the funding.
6. The proportion of funding targeted towards Indigenous homelessness should be increased to address inequities in funding allocations and align with level of need.
7. Provincial governments should specifically allocate funding to address Indigenous homelessness in addition to broadly based funding to address homelessness.
8. Governments should reduce restrictions where funding is being used and allow funding to be used both on and off reserve (as long as this does not jeopardize federal funding).
9. First Nations homelessness services must be decolonized from traditional Western approaches and reflect more deeply Indigenous worldviews. This includes acknowledgement of the self-determination and jurisdiction of First Nations communities and leaders to address and respond to the needs of their peoples. As the Federal Government continues to strengthen its relationships with First Nations, including increased capacity for First Nations to provide services to their citizens

living in urban centres, it provide an opportunities for a growing presence and voice to First Nations in the solutions to First Nations homelessness.

10. First Nations homelessness services should be based on a holistic definition of First Nations homelessness. While a definition of Indigenous homelessness was developed by Thistle, a First Nations-specific definition may also be beneficial.
11. Opportunities must be created for greater leadership and autonomy of First Nations to enable funding and services to be First Nations led and delivered. While there may be opportunities for partnerships between First Nations governments/organizations, Indigenous organizations, and mainstream homelessness funders, governance bodies, and service providers, there is a need to ensure that First Nations experts and leadership have at least equal power in the process of co-creating services. Importantly, this includes addressing underfunding issues of Indigenous organizations to support the same capacity as non-Indigenous organizations.
12. All decision-makers and service providers should be culturally informed, which means having Indigenous representatives in leadership and management positions within mainstream service organizations and cultural competency training for staff. It also means strengthening relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers so that non-Indigenous organizations are better informed and better able to provide culturally appropriate supports.
13. Services created to address First Nations homelessness should consider promising practices in service delivery to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, including:
 - Incorporating cultural values and practices, like incorporating the Seven Grandfather Teachings and Medicine Wheel into the service's core principles, engaging in ceremonies, and supporting connections to Elders and to community
 - Taking a trauma-informed approach, including developing intake processes and assessments that avoid re-traumatization
 - Supporting the whole person, including their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs, in the context of their families, communities, and Nations.