

The Issue

Currently, Canada has no strategy or funding stream that specifically tackles youth homelessness, yet more than 6,000 Canadian youth experience homelessness on any given night, representing about 20% of the country's homeless population.ⁱ Youth homelessness is an ongoing issue that disproportionately affects Indigenous, LGBTQ+ and racialized youth.

A targeted approach to address youth homelessness is essential. Causes of youth homelessness are distinct. The unique experiences of young people related to homelessness require solutions that are tailored to youth, ensuring them safe and stable homes. Back in 1999, the government allocated \$20 million annually specifically to address youth homelessness, but this targeted funding stopped in 2003.ⁱⁱ

Causes of Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is a complex issue resulting from a combination of factors. Dr. Stephen Gaetz identified three types of factors that can create youth homelessness: individual/relational factors, structural factors, and institutional and system failures. These encompass experiences of interpersonal violence, particularly with a family member, poverty, lack of accessible and affordable housing, inadequate support to transition from the care system or from a mental health institution, lack of coordination between systems, etc.

Youth are also subject to intersecting forms of discrimination based on age, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other factors, whether they are trying to secure rental accommodation, accessing services, or living on the street. For example, one in three trans youth is rejected from a shelter.ⁱⁱⁱ

Impacts

Youth homelessness can have a severe long-term impact on young Canadians, including disengagement from school, mental health problems and addictions, increased risk of exploitation, greater involvement with the police, and difficulty exiting the streets^{iv}. The longer a young person is homeless, the more likely they are to suffer severe, long-term impacts on their well-being. Homeless youth, especially women and girls, and LGBTQ+ youth, are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Based on the National Youth Survey, 85% of homeless youth experienced mental health crises, 42% attempted suicide at least once, and 35% experienced a drug overdose for which they required hospitalization.^v

Ending Youth Homelessness

Proposed by: CFUW BC Council

Adopted at the 2018 AGM

RESOLVED, That CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women) urges the Government of Canada to work in cooperation with Provincial, Territorial, Municipal and Indigenous governments to develop and implement strategies and support programs, both long and short term, to address and take action on the root causes of youth homelessness.

RESOLVED, That CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women) urges the Government of Canada to provide sufficient funding to combat youth homelessness specifically targeting those aging out of government care, Indigenous youth, youth with mental health and addiction issues, youth with physical health issues, and LGBTQ+ youth.

RESOLVED, That CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women) urges the Government of Canada to support communities and organizations that have researched and developed strategies to prevent youth homelessness and/or support vulnerable youth, but have insufficient funds to implement these strategies.

331 Cooper Street,
Suite 502
Ottawa, ON, K2P 0G5
Tel: 1-613-234-8252
www.cfuw.org

National Housing Strategy

To respond to Canada's long-standing housing crisis, the 2017 National Housing Strategy allocates \$40 billion over 10 years and aims to reduce chronic homelessness by 50%. Yet according to the *Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness*, chronic and episodic homelessness represents less than 15% of individuals experiencing homelessness.^{vi} The full scope of homelessness, especially the invisible homelessness experienced by youth, must be considered in government needs-assessments and target-setting.

The Right to Adequate Housing for Youth

Canada is a signatory to several international conventions which protect the right to adequate housing, namely, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 11), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 16 and 27) and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (Art. 14 and 15). Canada has a legal obligation to ensure the fundamental right of youth to adequate housing and standard of living.

What Can Be Done?

Although there has been a focus on emergency services for youth experiencing homelessness in recent years, it is important that we not only focus on how to help homeless youth get off the street, but to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place by ensuring that support systems are aligned with this mandate.

CFUW recommends that the federal government:

Develop a strategy focused on homeless youth in coordination with all levels of government (Federal, Provincial/Territorial, Municipal, and Indigenous) in order to address the root causes of youth homelessness.

Provide specific and sufficient funding to combat youth homelessness, targeting youth aging out of government care, Indigenous youth, youth with mental health and addiction issues, youth with physical health issues, and LGBTQ+ youth.

Provide funding to communities and organizations that have researched and developed strategies to prevent youth homelessness and/or to support vulnerable youth, and that that are in need of funds to implement these strategies.

ⁱ United Way. "Report on Youth Homelessness 2018", 2018, URL

http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Report_on_homeless_youth_WEB%202.pdf

ⁱⁱ Gaetz, Stephen & Redman, Melanie. "Federal Investment in Youth Homelessness", 2016, URL

http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Policy_Brief.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Abramovich, Alex. "1 in 3 transgender youth will be rejected by a shelter on account of their gender identity/expression", 2014, URL

<http://homelesshub.ca/blog/1-3-transgender-youth-will-be-rejected-shelter-account-their-gender-identityexpression>

^{iv} Gaetz, Stephen; O'Grady, Bill; Buccieri, Kristy; Karabanow, Jeff; & Marsolais, Allyson (Eds.), *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

^v Gaetz, S and al. "Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey", 2016, URL

<http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/WithoutAHome-final.pdf>

^{vi} Gaetz, S. "The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' Submission to the National Consultation on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing", June 2018, URL http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FINAL_COH_housing_Submission_180607.pdf

Definition of Youth Homelessness by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

"Youth homelessness" refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe, or consistent residence.