

# Discussing Homelessness

Identifying Health Inequities, Dispelling Stigma, Considering Next Steps

Presentation by Health for Homeless



 @health.for.homeless



@healthforhomelesscanada

# What do you think of when you hear the word **HOMELESSNESS?**



Share your answers by scanning the code; it's anonymous so don't be shy!

# Canadian Definition of Homelessness

## Homelessness

describes the situation of an

**INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY or COMMUNITY**

without

**STABLE, SAFE, PERMANENT or  
APPROPRIATE HOUSING**

or the immediate prospect, means,  
and ability of acquiring it.



<https://www.blogto.com/city/2021/03/people-toronto-say-new-plan-shelter-homeless-pr-stu-nt-evict-encampement-residents/>

# Canadian Definition of Homelessness

## Homelessness

describes the situation of an

**INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY or COMMUNITY**

**HOMELESSNESS IS NOT A CHOICE!**

or the immediate prospect, means  
and ability of acquiring it.

Lack of  
affordable and  
appropriate  
housing

Poverty

Systemic /social  
barriers  
(Ex. discrimination)

Complex cultural,  
mental, behavioural,  
and biomedical  
influences

# Homelessness in Canada: By the Numbers



## QUESTION !

**How many people do you think experience homelessness in Canada every year?**

**A** Around 20,000

**C** Around 150,000

**B** Around 100,000

**D** Around 200,000

## QUESTION !

How many people do you think experience homelessness in Canada every year?

A Around 5,000

C Around 150,000

B Around 100,000

**D Around 200,000**

# 235,000

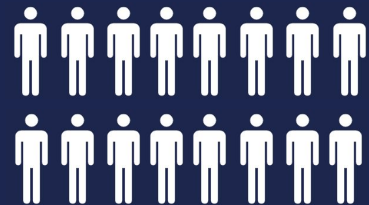
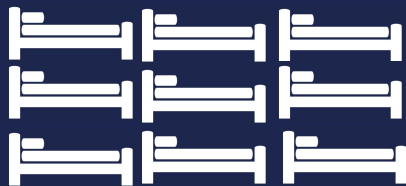
Canadians experience homelessness  
at some point every year

Between 10-15% will be homeless tonight!

That's **25-35,000** people

But, across Canada, emergency shelters can only offer

**16,000** beds.



# A Little Perspective...



# Homelessness Crisis!

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto have **doubled** over **4 years** (2021-2024)!



7,300

April 2021

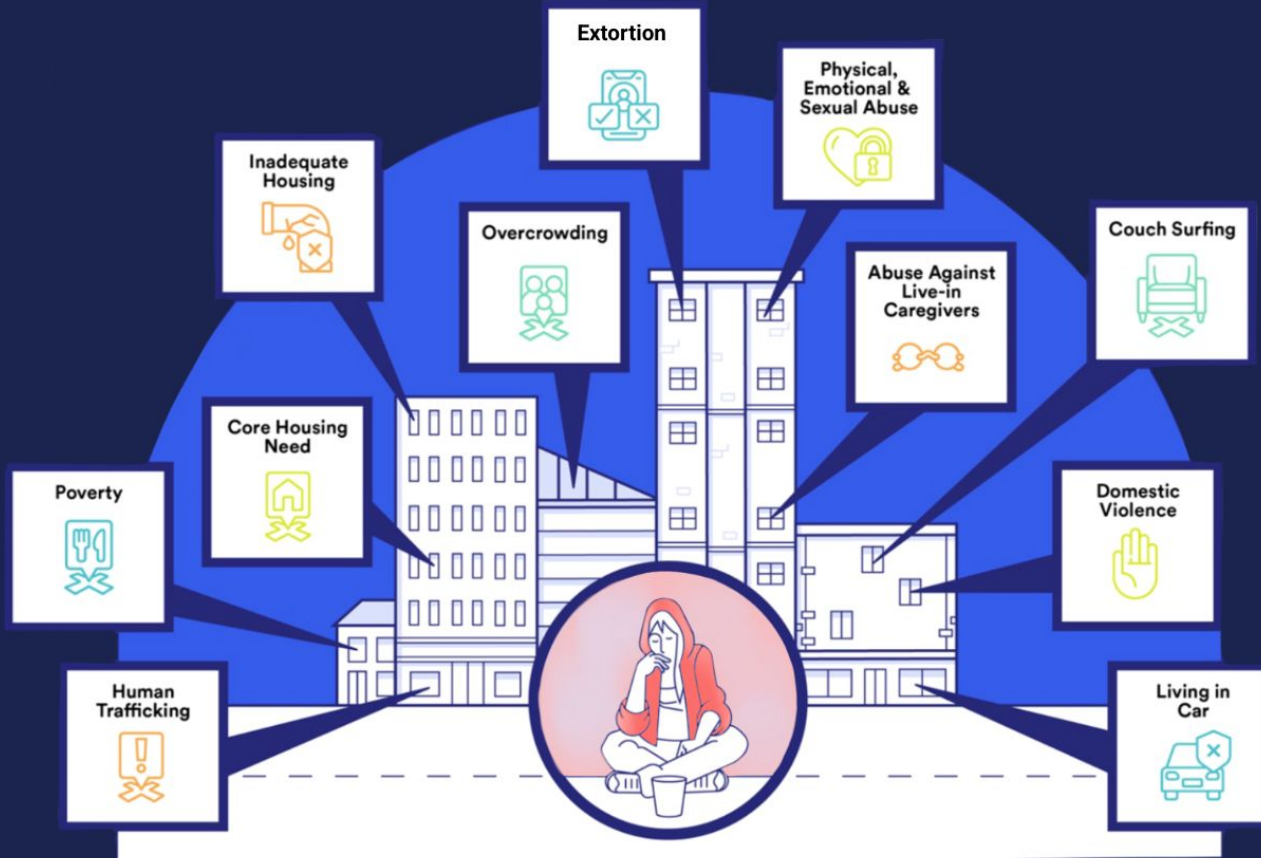


15,400

October 2024

# Types of Homelessness

## Visible and Hidden!



# Types of Homelessness



# Types of Homelessness— A Continuum



## 01 At Risk of Homelessness

This includes housing that is **not suitable or safe**.

Ex. Overcrowded home where there are not enough places to sleep for the family composition.



<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/498632989970477736/>

# Types of Homelessness— A Continuum



## 01 At Risk of Homelessness

This includes housing that is **not suitable or safe.**

Ex. Overcrowded home where there are not enough places to sleep for the family composition.



## 02 Unsheltered

These individuals may be living in public spaces like sidewalks or parks, or staying in places that are **unsafe for human habitation.**

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## 03 Emergency Sheltered



These individuals use the shelter system, which provides **short-term shelter beds (30-90 days)**. May or may not include other services such as food, clothing or counselling.



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## 04 Provisionally Accommodated



This includes **longer-term transitional housing**, which typically offer a greater intensity of support services catered toward providing clients with stability and self-sufficiency.



370

transitional houses  
across Canada



2,000

total beds in Ontario



15,400

Individuals  
experiencing  
homelessness in  
Toronto alone

# Causes of Homelessness



# An interplay between 3 domains



**Structural  
Factors**



**System Failures**



**Personal circumstances**



# Structural Factors

## Economic and Social Issues

Poverty



Lack of  
affordable housing



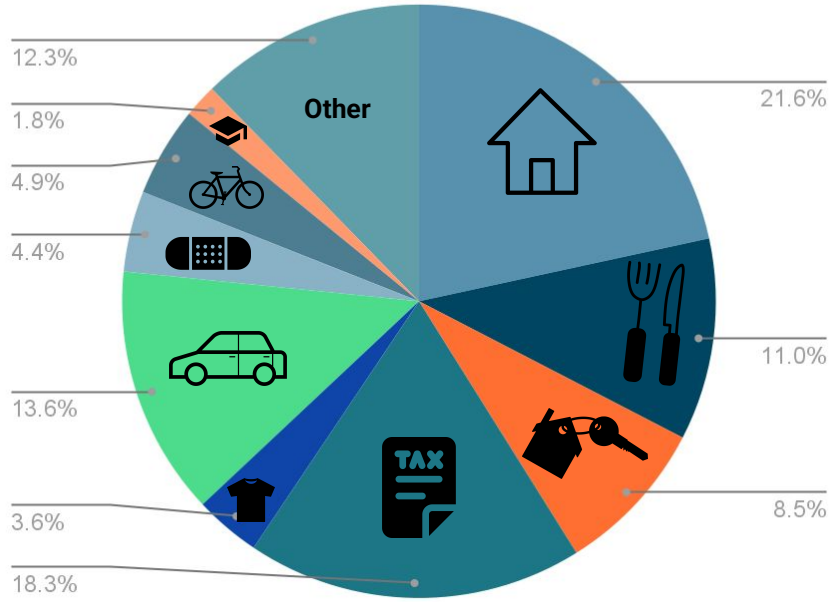
Discrimination



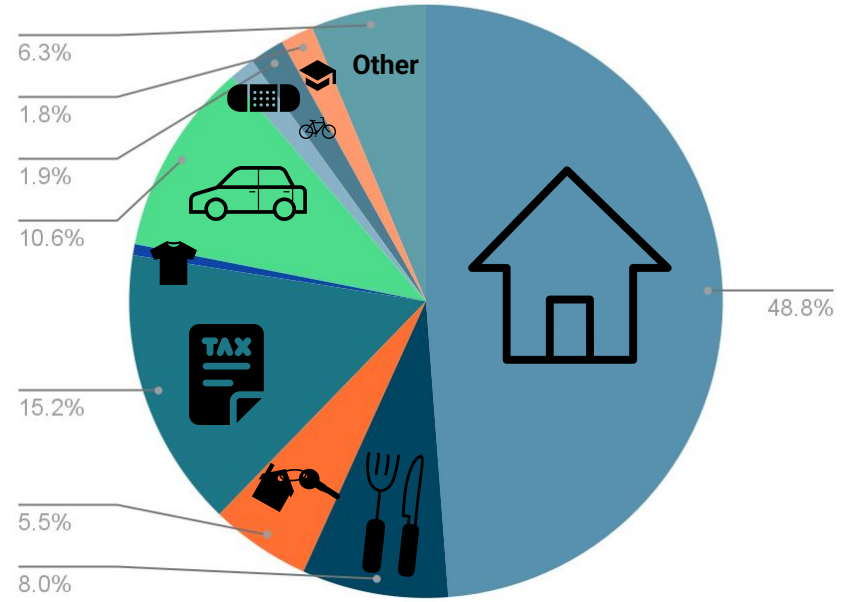


# Structural Factors

## Average Household Expenditures



## Families living in Core Need





## Structural Factors

### What is affordable housing?

Government-assisted housing for low-to-moderate-income households.



Government helps subsidize **the rest**

Tenants pay **30%** of their monthly income

### FACT:

50 years ago, **20%** of Canada's housing supply was devoted to social housing.

**Today, it's less than 4%**



# System Failures

## Shortcomings of systems of care and support

Inadequate discharge planning for people leaving hospitals



Addictions facilities



Mental health support



Support for immigrants and refugees





# Personal Circumstances

01

## Personal Crisis

Including...

- Traumatic events
- Domestic violence
- Job loss
- Family break-up
- Illness

02

## Mental Health and Addiction

- Can be very debilitating
- Can interfere with individual's capacity to handle day-to-day challenges

# Demographics



# QUESTION !

Which of the following groups do you think experience disproportionate rates of homelessness?

A

Indigenous Community

B

LGBTQ2S+ Community

C

Women

D

Racialized Community

E

Men

F

Newcomers to Canada

# QUESTION !

Which of the following groups do you think experience disproportionate rates of homelessness?

A

Indigenous Community

B

LGBTQ2S+ Community

C

Women

hidden homelessness!

D

Racialized Community

E

Men

Visible, chronic homelessness!

F

Newcomers to Canada

# Population Demographics of those Experiencing Homelessness

13%

identified as  
LGBTQ2S+



35%

are women



31%

identified as  
Indigenous



13%

were born outside  
Canada



55%

are between  
ages 25 and 49

20%

identified as  
members of  
racialized  
communities



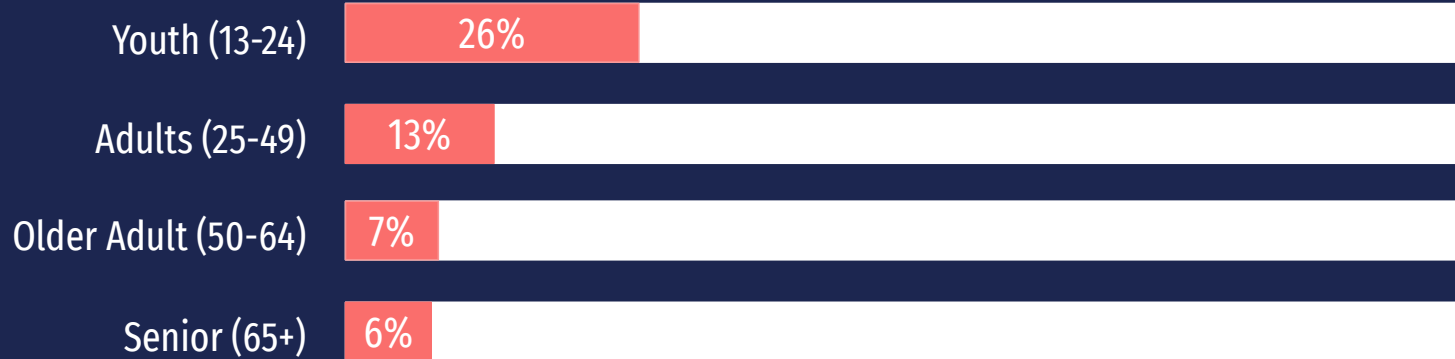


# Homelessness & the LGBTQ2S+ Community

Everyone Counts 2020-2022 survey  
on homelessness in Canada:

13%

Identified as LGBTQ2S+



Among all Canadians:

4%

Identified as LGBTQ2S+

# Youth Homelessness in Canada

Ages 13 to 24

Leave homes where they may have been socially and economically dependent on adult caregivers



**20%** of Canada's homeless population are youth (~40,000 people)

Due to their age and relative inexperience, often unable to get a job or stable housing

Much more vulnerable to crimes and exploitation

# Insights From Youth with Lived Experiences

“My trauma led me down a wrong path, and I didn’t know that I had ... places where I could go to access help for that. And my family didn’t know how to support me with my mental health. So they ended up giving up on me because they didn’t know... how. And they didn’t have... anyone show them or teach them how to take care of someone with those circumstances.”

**Kamloops Youth**

“Education is hard to get because housing is hard to get.”

**Calgary Youth**

“To access BC housing or any youth rent subsidies, you have to be homeless for a **minimum of six months before they’ll even look at you**. Six months is a long time... some of them can make it through that time period, but some can’t.”

**Vancouver Youth**

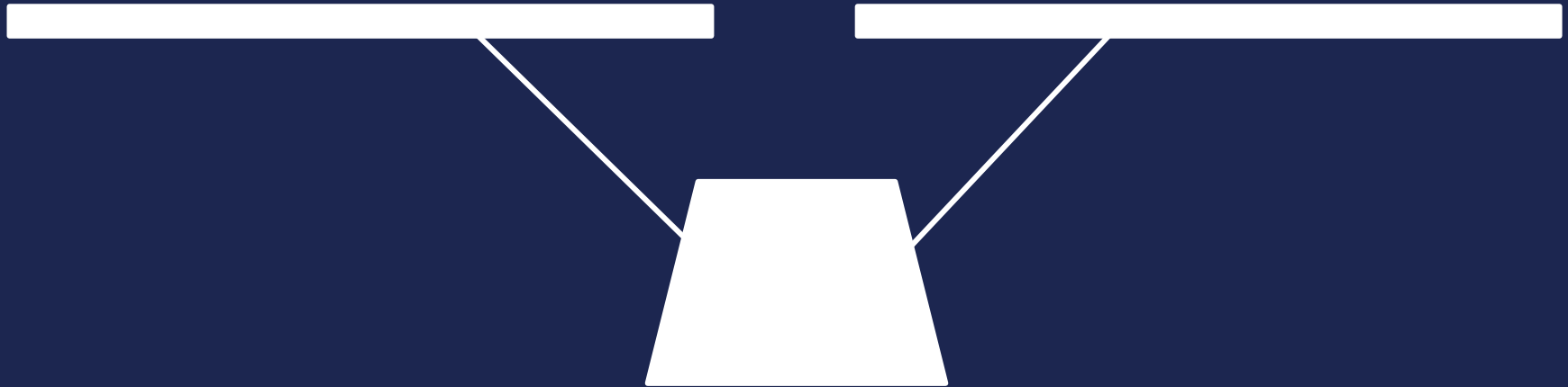
# Stigma



# Which do you hear more often?

They are homeless  
because of **who they are.**

They are homeless  
because of **what has  
happened around them.**



Which of the following statements were actually said online?

- A. “Maybe we should spray homeless people with febreze.”
- B. “There’s this crazy homeless guy sitting on our porch... just in case I die, you all know.
- C. “I only give money to homeless people if they’re old or disabled. If you’re my age you need to get a job. Stores pay people to hold signs.”
- D. “When I see a homeless person I honestly don’t know if they're faking or not so they get nothing from me.”

# Common Stigmas

They're homeless because they're lazy!

They *choose* to live on the street.

They don't care about hygiene!

All homeless people have substance use problems.

Homeless people are dangerous or violent.

# Common Stigmas

They're homeless because they're lazy!

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It is hard to stay clean when you don't have access to a bathroom, shower, sink, bar of soap, or toothbrush!

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Homeless people are dangerous or violent.

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It is hard to stay clean when you don't have access to a bathroom, shower, sink, bar of soap, or toothbrush!

Some do. Many don't. Substance use may be a coping mechanism *after* they've become homeless.

Homeless people are dangerous or violent.

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Homeless people are more likely to be **victims** of crimes than perpetrators.

# Common Stigmas

They're homeless because they're lazy!

Many don't know what options they have for getting help or feel betrayed by the system!

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Homeless people are more likely to be **victims** of crimes than perpetrators.

They're homeless because they're lazy!



This type of thinking...

- makes unhoused people feel *other*
- *Reflects assumptions* we make about their personal attributes.
- makes it easier for us to look down on people because we think that they must deserve their situation.
- *normalizes physical, mental, and social suffering*

**Stigmas simplify complex situations.  
They turn systemic problems into personal blame.**

# Consequences of Stigma

## The Salvation Army (2011) found that...



**> 1/3** of Canadians are scared  
of homeless people



**~ 40%** of Canadians believe  
homelessness is a lifestyle that  
is deliberately chosen



## **CASE STUDY 2**

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# **Stigmas, Criminalization, & Homelessness**



This is Matt. He is 32 years old. He has been homeless for the last 2 months, and it has been hard.

He does not have enough money to buy lunch today, so he sits outside a store with his guitar and a cup in the hopes that passersby will donate some change.

The store owners call the police, worried Matt might steal something or break in.

The police shows up and pedestrians in the area watch.

They whisper between one another, creating stories about Matt being a criminal.



Do you think police involvement was needed?

Do you think your reaction would be different if you saw an ambulance show up instead of a policeman?

# Criminalizing homelessness

Ontario's *Safe Streets Act* makes **panhandling** (begging for money) illegal.

- 1st offense = \$500 fine
- 2nd offense: up to \$1,000 fine + up to 6 months in jail



- Such laws only try to make homelessness less visible. They **do not tackle the underlying causes** of homelessness.
- Police involvement when there has been no wrong-doing can make the unhoused population appear “dangerous” in the public view.

**Real Case:** Penticton, BC spent **\$30,000** on legal fees in their prosecution of Paul Braun who had racked up **\$145** dollars in fines from panhandling tickets.

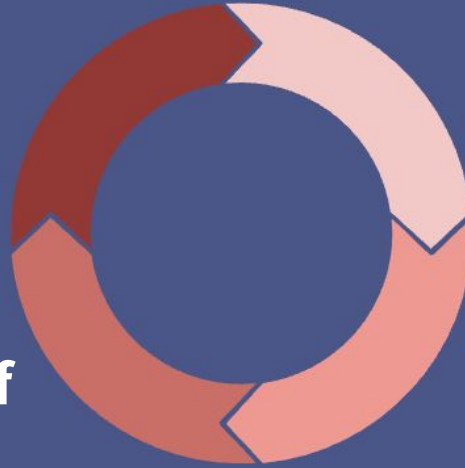
# A vicious spiral

**Social systems fail**

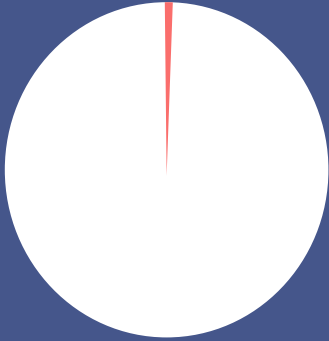
**Arrest + imprisonment**

**Greater public fear of  
homeless people**

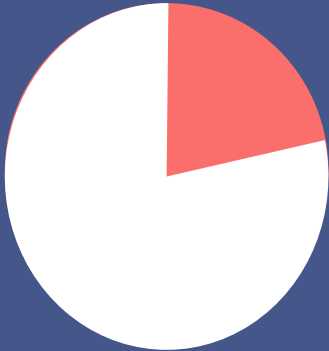
**Permanent label as  
a “criminal”**



# Homelessness and Canada's prisons



**0.6%** of Canadians experience homelessness in a year



But **23%** of the Canadian prison population were experiencing homelessness when they were incarcerated

# Why work towards destigmatizing homelessness?

These harmful misconceptions about homelessness are **long standing** and **hard to get rid of**.

Learning to recognize and challenge stigma can hopefully result in sensitive and compassionate conversations, which may lead to innovative solutions and policies that address the roots of homelessness.



# Myth Busters!

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TRUE OR FALSE?

## How to participate:

- Different statements will appear on the screen.
- Discuss for a minute with your classmates
- If you are comfortable, raise your hand if you agree

Hopefully, you will learn something new and challenge some assumptions you may have!

# Myth Buster

---

TRUE OR FALSE?

Homelessness only  
includes those living on  
the street.

**False**

---

Remember that homelessness also includes:

- the use of emergency shelters
- the use of transitional housing
- homes that don't meet health and safety standards
- couch surfing
- living in one's car

# Myth Buster

---

TRUE OR FALSE?

Homeless people are lazy  
and choose not to find jobs.

**False**

---

“Many people experiencing homelessness do not have the option of being stagnant or lazy.”

- Homeless Hub

# Myth Buster

---

TRUE OR FALSE?

If individuals experiencing homelessness are able to secure a job, they will eventually be able to escape homelessness.

**False**

---

Unhoused people have a really hard time finding and keeping a job.

- No permanent address
- No phone number
- Transportation is difficult
- Health problems
- Disabilities
- Discrimination

**And 20% of unhoused people in Toronto are employed!**

# Myth Buster

---

TRUE OR FALSE?

There are many support services for the unhoused population. The problem is in getting people to use them.

# Partially False

---

## Canada mostly uses an emergency response approach to homelessness

On its own this is not very effective because it is not supported by long-term solutions and prevention programs like...

- Life-sustaining (ex. food, shelter, clothing)
- Counselling
- Child care support
- Employment services (ex. resume building)
- Money management courses
- Health and wellness promotion
- Social engagement initiatives

# Myth Buster

---

TRUE OR FALSE?

It is impossible to end homelessness.

**FALSE**

---

Many organizations are striving to end the homelessness epidemic, and we can each do our part to help!

More on this coming up...

# Debrief

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## Mythbusters

- Did anything surprise you?
- Did you learn anything new?
- What are some ways you think you can help work towards helping the unhoused population?

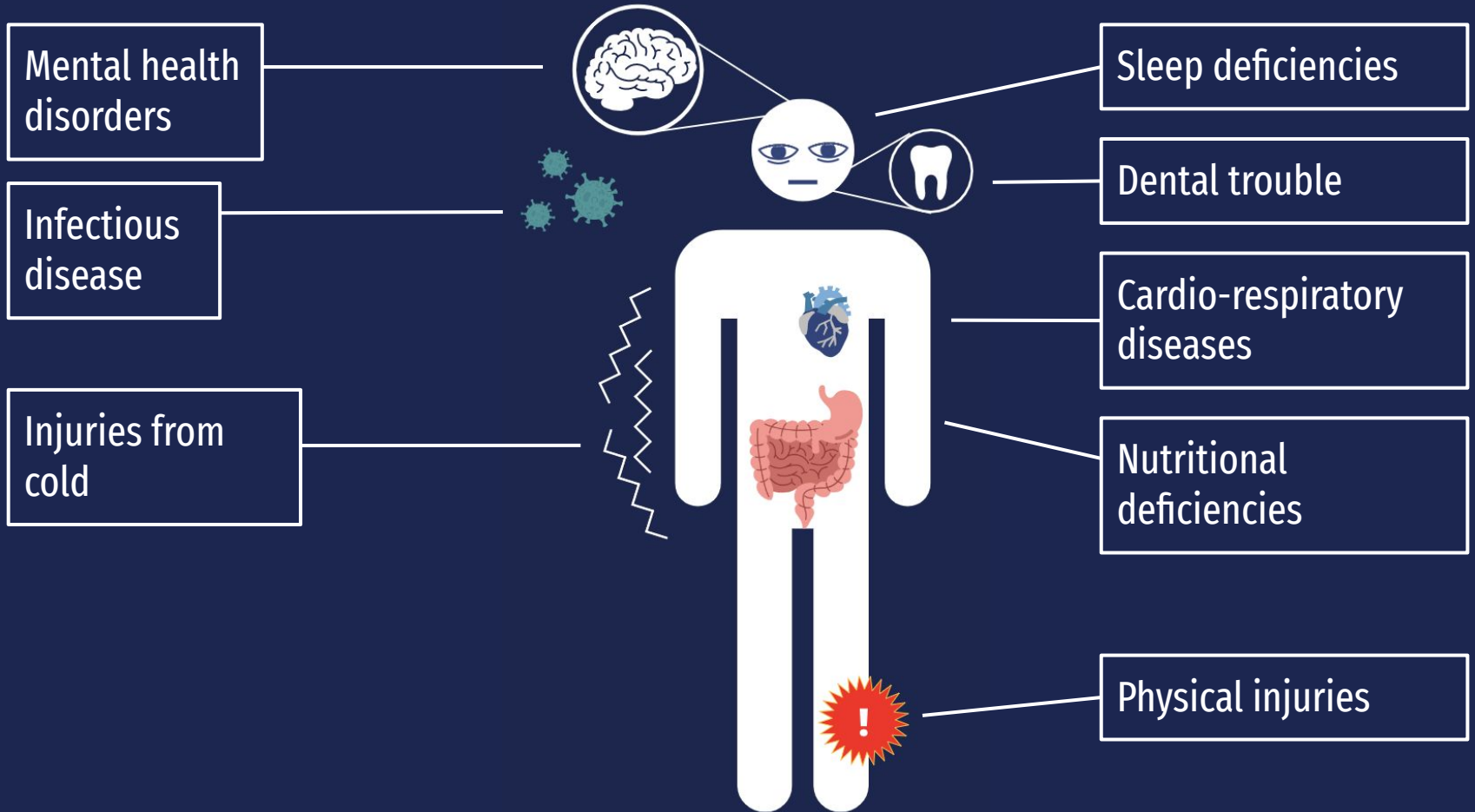
# Health in the Unhoused



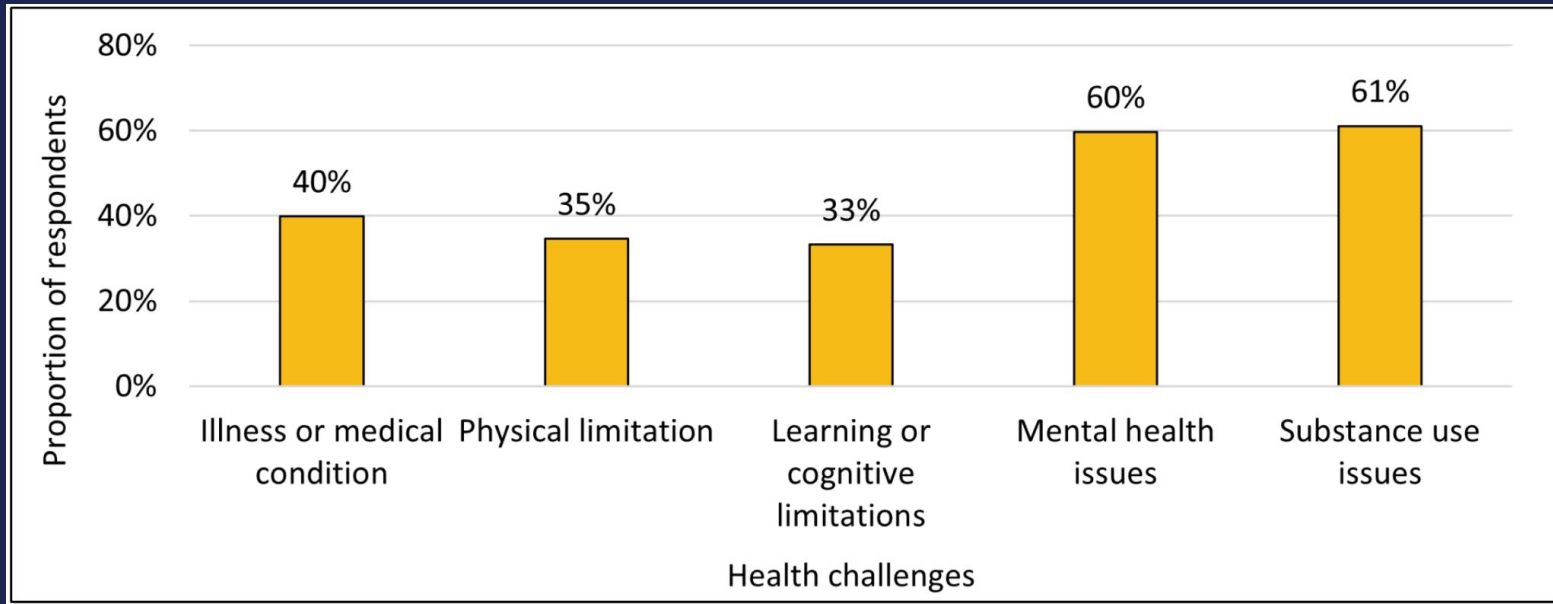
↓ Income      ↓ Health

Poor Health      ↔ Homelessness

# Health in the Unhoused Population



**85%** have at least **one** health challenge.  
**67%** have **two or more**.



# What are Safe Consumption Sites?

These are safe, clean, non-judgemental spaces for people to use their own drugs. They are supervised by medically-trained professionals.



## MYTH

## EVIDENCE

**Encourage drug use/addictions**

- Form of **HARM REDUCTION!**
- Decrease blood disease transmission from shared needles.
- Decrease deaths by offering immediate access to medical professionals
- Decrease public drug use and discarded needles
- Increase access to addictions counselling or recovery services

**Encourage criminal activity**

Studies in Vancouver, Toronto, and Sydney show that SCS **DO NOT INCREASE**, and in some cases reduce, crime rates in surrounding areas.

**Attract more drug users to the community**

**NO EVIDENCE** for this. SCS just provide a place for your community members/neighbours who do use drugs to do so in a safe, monitored setting.

**Are a waste of taxpayer money**

- SCS are **cost-effective** and **SAVE PUBLIC FUNDS!**
- Prevent expensive emergency room visits, ambulance calls, and the long-term cost of treating infections like HIV.



# CASE STUDY 3

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## Wet Socks

Charlotte has been sleeping in tents this past winter and spring.

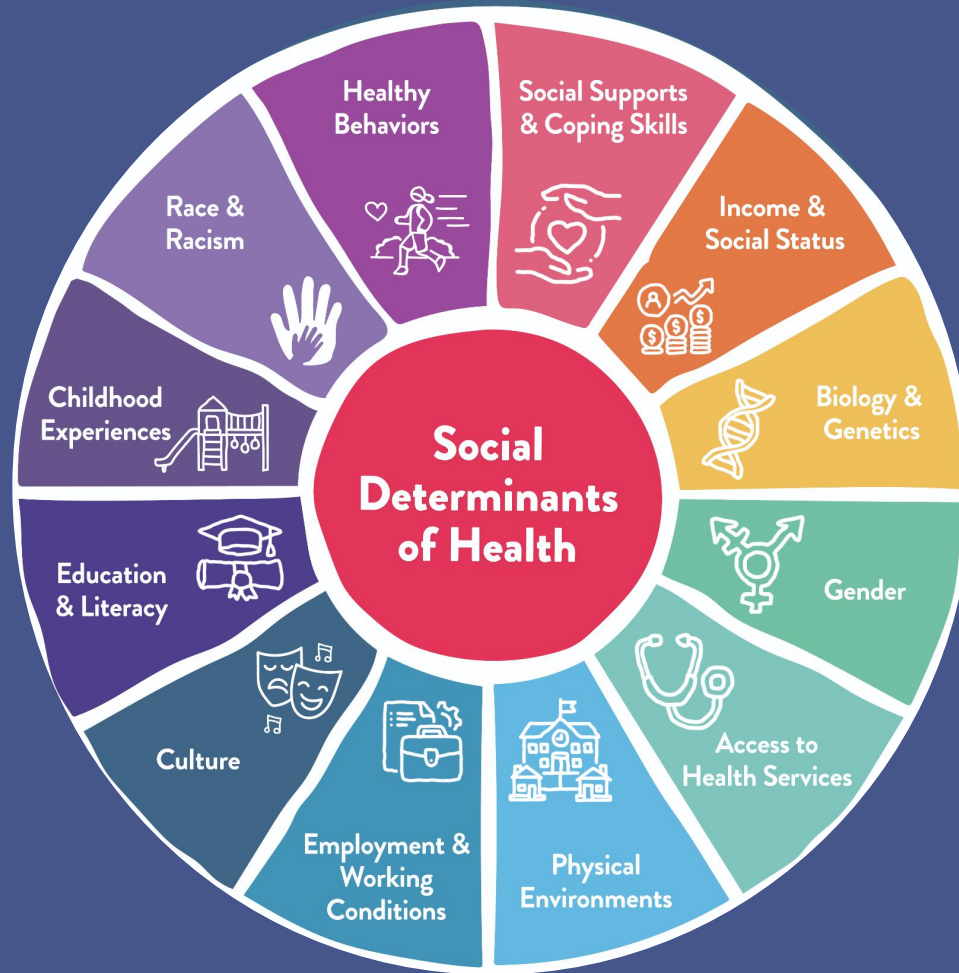
All her clothes and belongings frequently get very wet and cold.

She suffers many painful cuts on her feet, frostbite, fungal infections between her toes, and trench foot.



- No clean, dry socks to change into
- No money to go to a laundromat to wash and dry her socks
- No money to buy new socks
- No way to afford a doctor's visit or medications for her wounds

**For Charlotte, dry socks are a matter of health!**



# Housing is health care!

Agency + autonomy in  
her health status

A safe and stable  
environment

Greater social inclusion

No stress/anxiety  
related to the rigors of  
being on the streets

**What would housing  
mean to Charlotte?**

Warmth, dryness,  
protection from weather

Better sleep

A fixed address to help  
her apply for OHIP and a  
job

A place to store and  
preserve food

# Barriers to Healthcare Access

When unhoused individuals do seek medical attention, they are often discriminated against, dismissed, or overlooked. This can cause them to receive inequitable treatment compared to other patients.



**Fear and distrust of the system cause many to stay away from healthcare services despite being among those who need help the most!**

A stylized graphic of a road on the left side of the image. The road is black with white dashed lines for lane markings and a solid white line on the right edge. It is bordered by a thick orange line. The road curves upwards and then downwards, creating a large 'S' shape. The background is a solid dark blue.

# Road to Solutions

# What does ending homelessness mean?

According to the Canadian Definition of Homelessness:

The “problem of homelessness and housing exclusion refers to the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and support are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing”.

**Ending homelessness does NOT mean that no one will ever need emergency housing**



# Prevention

**We must stop homelessness before it even begins.**

# Prevention Strategies

## 1 Primary prevention



Structural and systemic level initiatives

### Examples

- ✓ Affordable healthcare
- ✓ Programs aimed at people with low-income
- ✓ Mental health supports
- ✓ Anti-discrimination policy

## 2 Secondary prevention



Individuals at immediate risk of homelessness

### Examples

- ✓ Emergency financial assistance
- ✓ Mediation with landlords

## 3 Tertiary prevention



Ongoing support to individuals experiencing homelessness

### Example

The Housing First Model

- ✓ Provides housing and also various services to prevent the recurrence of homelessness

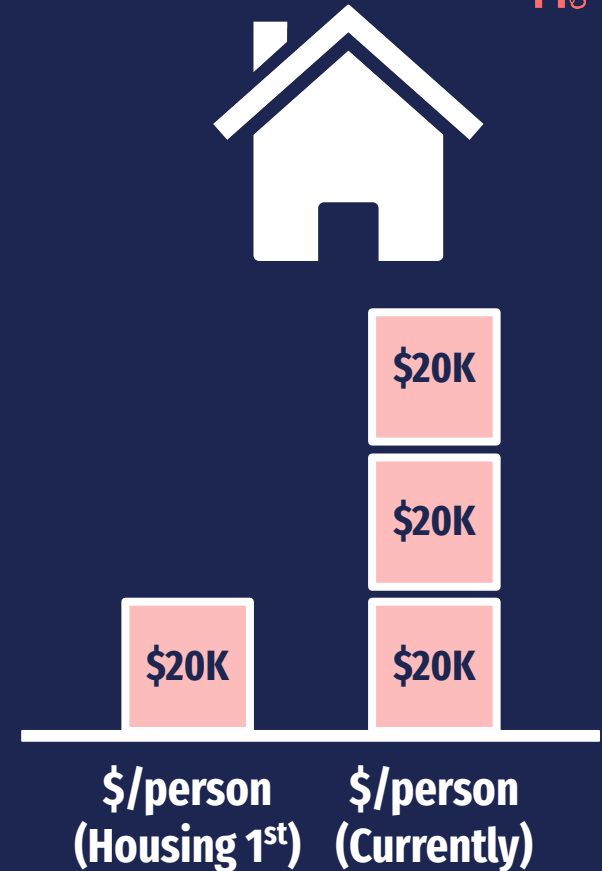
# Housing First

## The premise:

- Individuals experiencing homelessness are provided with:
  - Their own private living space
  - Support services for nutrition, stress, job searching, skill building, and more are provided by professionals

## The benefits:

- Up to 85% of people provided with housing and these supports do not return to being homeless
- Housing first is **3x cheaper** than doing nothing to help
  - Average cost of a street-dwelling individual: ~ \$60,000
  - Average cost per person of Housing First: ~ \$20,000

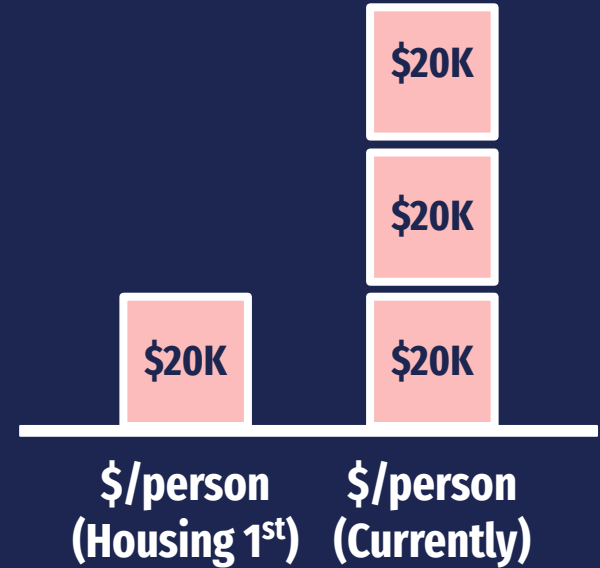


# Housing First



## KEY TAKEAWAY:

- Housing First is a tried and tested solution to help those experiencing homelessness and it saves everyone money!



# What has **HSH** been up to?



PODCAST

## A Hidden Epidemic: Homelessness and Health Inequity

Health for Homeless



# What can you do?

## Health for Homeless



**About Us**

**Educational Workshops**

- Accurate and easily accessible information pertaining to homelessness across the GTA, especially youth homelessness and the effects on minorities

**Resources**

- Volunteer Activities
  - Mentor Volunteers (opportunity to contribute to the community while building and fostering meaningful relationships – mutually beneficial)
    - Yonge Street Mission
    - The Redwood
  - Tutor Volunteers (relevant to students in high school, good opportunity to practice and benefit from it as well)
    - Youth Without Shelter
    - The Redwood
  - Other volunteer opportunities at special events
    - Wychwood



Check out Access York (1-877-464-9675)

**HFH Podcast**  
Discussions and interviews with guests and experts in the field across the province.



**How to Get Involved**

HFH is an intricate web that functions through education pod, communications pod, finance, and community support



For more info check out our website:  
healthforhomeless.ca

Follow our socials @health.for.homeless

Join our team:  
www.healthforhomeless/join



[https://www.canva.com/design/DAFRt\\_n9klrU/KJe5w6fjepbWaLUAOPTacQ/view](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFRt_n9klrU/KJe5w6fjepbWaLUAOPTacQ/view)

**Thank you so much for  
listening and participating!**

**Questions? Thoughts?**

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**Please take some time to fill out this feedback form!**



**It's anonymous so don't be shy!**