



Community Strategy

to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton

This strategy serves as a guide towards developing a clear agenda for government and community stakeholders to enhance coordination and integration amongst systems and community partners, prioritize prevention and sustainability, and identify clear strategies around housing and supports for youth based on Housing First.



“Homelessness cannot be solved by a single agency or organization, by a single level of government, or by a single sector. Everyone should be reminded of the intricacies of homelessness as a policy area, and remember that preventing and ending homelessness will take real coordination, collaboration, and a constant exchange of ideas.”

Former HHS Secretary- Kathleen Sebelius

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this community strategy would not have been possible without the participation of Edmonton's youth serving sector. The sharing of knowledge and experiences has been instrumental to identifying gaps and recommendations concerning youth homelessness.

This document also draws upon the extensive research and youth strategies that have been developed by communities and service partners across Canada.

Homeward Trust would like to formally acknowledge Edmonton's youth and homeless serving sector, systems partners and community for their insights, recommendations and commitment to ending youth homelessness in our city.

We also thank the youth who participated in the Youth Consultation.



ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The goal of the *Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton* is to inspire innovation, shared principles, and ways forward for strategic cross-systems and integrated planning for our community of stakeholders, in order to work together more collaboratively to achieve our shared vision of ending youth homelessness.

The origins of the report began with Homeward Trust's work with the youth sector in relation to the Winter Emergency Response program, which provides funding and coordination for winter warming centres. Homeless youth were encountering serious gaps at the systems level and misconnections at the community level, and in the end were accessing programs/services not equipped to address their specific needs and conditions. Given the impending winter season, there was a sense of urgency to ensure the most vulnerable youth could access services and be guided along clear pathways to permanent housing and support options to keep them safe and healthy. As a response to these concerns, and to help Homeward Trust understand its role in terms of community-level resourcing and cross-systems planning, Edmonton's homelessness sector and systems partners were engaged to exchange knowledge, identify gaps, and prioritize areas to focus resources and planning.

This strategy serves as a guide towards developing a clear agenda for government and community stakeholders to enhance coordination and integration amongst systems and community partners, prioritize prevention and sustainability, and identify clear strategies around housing and supports for youth based on Housing First. The

responses presented within this document are built upon youth-centered and strengths-based approaches, equally prioritizing the psychological, physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being of young persons (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011).

This community strategy is not the final step, but the first giant leap toward the goal of ending youth homelessness. The specifics of the strategy will evolve over time in order to meet the changing needs of youth, and to adapt to shifting policy environments and trends identified within the youth serving sector. This evolution will be an active process of revisiting and refining the strategy as it is implemented.

While the strategy initially focused upon youth engaged in high-risk behaviours, the scope has been expanded to encompass a broader frame, addressing the needs and contexts of any homeless or at-risk youth in Edmonton.

“This is not the final step, but the first giant leap toward the goal of ending youth homelessness”



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton actively engages stakeholders in strategic cross-systems and integrated planning to achieve a shared vision of ending youth homelessness in Edmonton. The genesis of this community strategy began with Homeward Trust’s work with the sector around the complex challenges related to youth homelessness. Homeward Trust began exploring research literature and promising practices on youth homelessness initiatives around the world, which provided a framework for drawing on the knowledge and experiences of Edmonton’s youth homeless serving sector, systems partners and at-risk youth themselves. Two community sessions and one youth consultation were held to exchange perspectives, identify gaps and barriers, and prioritize key areas to focus resources and planning to achieve the community’s objective of ending youth homelessness.

As a guiding document, this community strategy connects to Homeward Trust’s *Edmonton and Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015* and aligns with the municipal and provincial *10-Year Plans* to end homelessness, as well as the Government of Alberta’s *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness*, which was released in January 2015.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY

This strategy builds upon the existing foundations of the 10-Year Plans to end homelessness, and the work of Edmonton’s youth serving sector and systems partners. It does not prescribe a “one size fits all” approach. Rather, it is adaptable and intended as a focal point for continued collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The strategy draws upon the vision and mission of the Government of Alberta’s Youth Plan and is supported by four core principles, with the goal of achieving five outcomes:

VISION



An Edmonton where all youth have a safe, supportive and nurturing home.

MISSION



To reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness and prevent further youth from becoming homeless by ensuring youth and their families have the services and supports they need.

PRINCIPLES



- Housing First approach
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Positive Youth Development
- Individualized & Youth Centered Supports

OUTCOMES



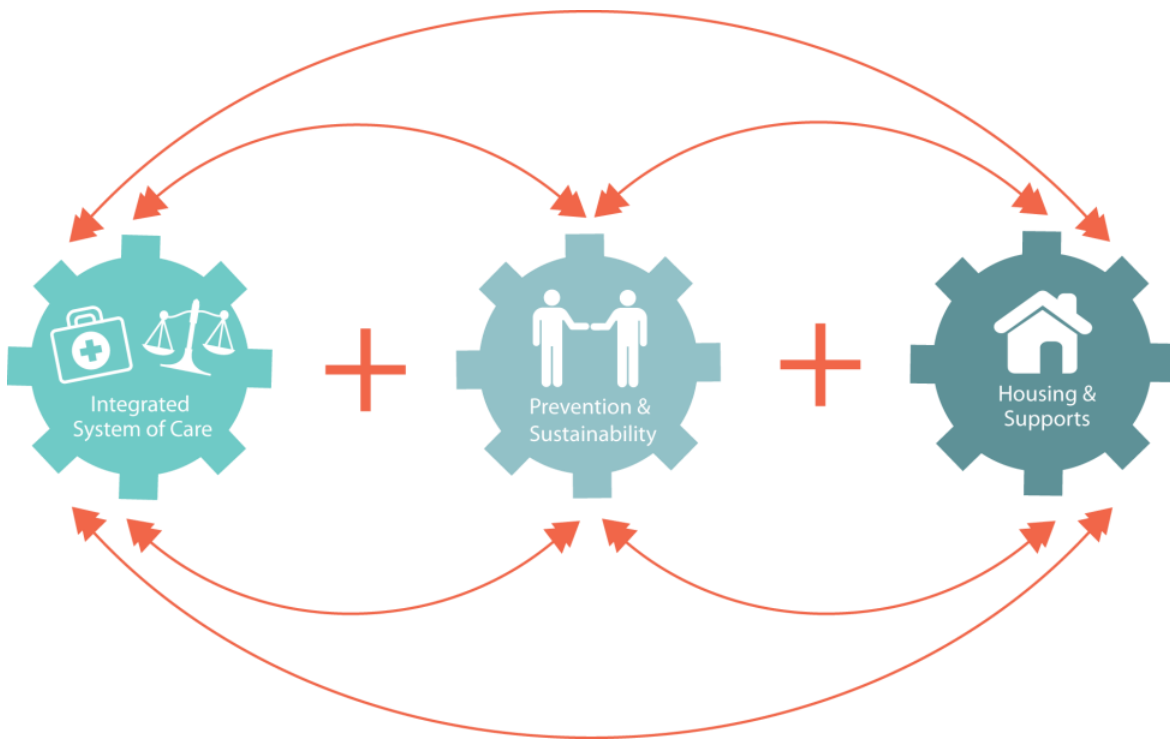
- Safe, Secure, Stable Housing
- Long Term Connections to Supports
- Improved Wellbeing
- Education
- Employment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GUIDING STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

From these foundations, the *Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton* adopts three strategies: an Integrated System of Care; Prevention & Sustainability; and Housing and Supports. Within each strategy are recommendations, which outline priority activities and initiatives. All strategies and recommendations are interconnected, thus it is important that they be pursued simultaneously.

Importantly, this strategy is a guide, not a prescription, for establishing a clear and collaborative mandate to ending youth homelessness in Edmonton. As an adaptive strategy, it will continually evolve, reflecting the shifting environment and developmental nature of community-based work and systems change.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRATEGY ONE

INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE

An integrated system of care addresses the needs of individuals through the coordination and integration of programs, services, and resources. It recognizes that different agencies or systems have specific roles and mandates, but embraces the need for a collaborative approach between all stakeholders to holistically serve the needs of youth.

1.1 Coordination of activities of youth serving agencies & systems partners

- >> Collaborative planning processes, open and constant communication, and knowledge exchange are commonplace amongst agencies, systems, programs and facilities.
- >> Appropriate supports and services are matched to meet the needs of youth.

1.2 Establish collective principles and values

- >> All stakeholders incorporate shared principles and values into operational mandates.
- >> Collective values provide a clear focus to guide actions, which ensures consistent messaging for youth across the system of care.

1.3 Establish a coordinated access and assessment strategy

- >> System wide responses are designed to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable through triaging and prioritized access to housing and supports.
- >> Use of common tools and protocols enables more effective flow through systems, including immediate assessments and identification of needs.

1.4 Coordinated research, data collection, information sharing and evaluation

- >> Constant research on homelessness initiatives at the local, national and international levels produces new strategies and approaches to continually adapt the strategy.
- >> Data collection enables a clearer picture of homeless populations/subpopulations through understanding of demographics, needs, and service efficacy.
- >> Program evaluation and agreed upon measures of success enable effective resource allocations and can guide changes to existing programs to enhance success.

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STRATEGY TWO

PREVENTION & SUSTAINABILITY

Prevention means eliminating or reducing the risks of youth becoming homeless in the first place. Successful prevention approaches require involvement of youth serving agencies, government, and organizations within and external to the homeless serving sector. They must focus on youth resiliency, mechanisms for family reunification, education and awareness, and adoption of a zero discharge policy into homelessness.

2.1 Education on pathways into homelessness and mental health and addictions

- >> Partnerships between youth serving agencies, systems and the community promote knowledge mobilization and education on causes of homelessness.
- >> Youth serving agencies, systems and the community raise awareness around trauma, mental health and addictions, and appropriate pathways and services to address them.

2.2 Youth engagement and resiliency strategies

- >> Youth are supported to reengage with education, recreation, and community activities.
- >> Providers promote development of protective factors including conflict resolution, life skills, problem solving, and anger management.

2.3 Education and awareness campaigns

- >> Partnerships are developed between youth serving agencies and schools/educational programs for information sharing to inform youth of services and options available and ways to access services.
- >> Common messaging developed by youth serving agencies, systems and community promotes education for teachers, administration and youth on homelessness issues.

2.4 Promotion of family reunification and supports

- >> Youth and family members are supported to develop understandings of family dynamics and relationships, how to build supportive and healthy relationships, and development of conflict resolution and anger management skills.
- >> Early counselling and mediation of family conflict, including 'cooling off' or respite services for youth, are readily available for early intervention and a return home when appropriate.

2.5 Youth employment and education programming

- >> Services offer opportunities for reengagement and support to return or stay in school.
- >> Employment skills are strengthened through training programs, connections to employment networks/employers, resume and interview skills development, and employer support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.6 Effective supports for youth aging out of government care

- >> Systems are in place for providing youth with life skills development, financial supports, psychological and emotional supports, access to education and employment, and health services before and during their transition from government care.

2.7 Zero discharge into homelessness

- >> Discharge planning from systems is improved through collaboration with case managers to ensure transitions include permanent housing and long term supports.
- >> Family mediation and conflict resolution are facilitated by youth serving agencies if youth need to leave home temporarily.
- >> A Housing First approach offers proactive, immediate access to appropriate housing options.

2.8 Aboriginal cultural safety approaches

- >> All stakeholders recognize and reflect on the impact of historic power dynamics that exist among individuals, communities and across cultures.
- >> Culturally safe services are defined and measured by those who receive the services.
- >> Service providers can work with the cultures, values, and historical contexts of Aboriginal people in Canada.

2.9 Cultural competence & connections for immigrants & newcomers

- >> There is greater awareness and understanding of the realities of individuals attributable to the process of integration, trauma, communication barriers, ethno-racial background, family composition, sexual orientation, mental health and addictions, gender and immigration status.
- >> Service providers incorporate holistic service approaches that are client-centered and culturally competent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRATEGY THREE

HOUSING & SUPPORTS

Ending youth homelessness requires a comprehensive continuum of housing and support options available to youth that takes into consideration individual preferences and developmental stages. Housing and supports must encompass a holistic approach that enables youth to successfully transition into adulthood.

3.1 Re-envisioning emergency services

- >> Shelters and drop in spaces act as centralized access points and outreach centres.
- >> Shelters immediately connect youth with appropriate supports and access to housing services.

3.2 Increase the amount of housing options available

- >> Youth have access to spectrum of housing options to meet their needs.
- >> Case management and supports provided by mainstream services enable youth to be sustainable in a variety of housing options.

3.3 Availability of affordable housing

- >> Youth and families have increased access to affordable housing.
- >> Youth have access to support in obtaining housing in the private market.

3.4 Housing First for youth

- >> Youth are given immediate access to permanent housing with no readiness requirements.
- >> Youth have choice and self-determination around services received and where they live.
- >> Youth can access a range of supports to enhance wellbeing and transitions into adulthood.

3.5 Continuous support service and case management

- >> Flexible and continuous case management and support services are available to establish meaningful relationships and help transition youth at their own pace.
- >> Needs assessments are ongoing and adaptable to meet the changing needs of youth.
- >> Long term supports, case management, and aftercare ensure successful outcomes.

3.6 Develop and maintain relationship-based approaches to supporting youth

- >> Youth themselves drive their supports and housing planning.
- >> Long term, stable, and positive relationships establish trust throughout system of care.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3.7 Maintain outreach services to connect youth with supports and housing

- >> Youth outreach programs establish connections with youth and build trusting relationships to foster engagement with other services and supports.
- >> Outreach is a conduit for connecting to mainstream, community and emergency services.

3.8 Appropriate/adequate services and supports for youth in high-risk situations

- >> Immediate assessments and coordinated access ensure youth with complex needs are receiving appropriate housing options and comprehensive supports.
- >> Mainstream services work in partnership with youth serving agencies to ensure youth with complex needs experience continuity and reliability in the supports they receive.

3.9 Enhance services/supports for diverse subpopulations

- >> Strong collaborations with specialized service providers facilitate linkages/networks to holistically support youth with special needs and backgrounds.
- >> Anti-discrimination and inclusive policies are incorporated into organizational mandates.
- >> Peer mentoring and positive role modeling are available to empower and connect youth with common backgrounds and lived experiences.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Discussions from consultations and engagement with community partners produced a number of recommendations to focus cross-systems planning efforts and community level resourcing. While all recommendations are important, three key priority areas were identified for immediate implementation:

Priority 1

- **Increase congregate supportive housing**

Build on the successes of existing programs in Edmonton, including the NOVA project. The focus should be on providing a safe and supportive space for youth to connect with services, their peers, and positive role models, and begin preparations for the next step, which may be independent living, family reunification, or permanent supportive housing. As much as possible, residential settings are preferable as a replacement for shelter-based models. The approach requires a commitment to the principles of Housing First combined with an understanding of the developmental needs of youth: a place where youth can feel unconditionally supported and secure as they prepare for permanent housing and independence on their own terms.

Priority 2

- **Develop comprehensive access points – access and resource hubs**

Integrated hubs involve the collaboration of multiple agencies, which are co-located within centralized points of access that serve a defined geographic area. The objective centres upon information sharing and drawing upon the strengths of the agencies involved. Hubs can help harmonize multiple mandates and improve information exchange and eliminate competition to provide a safe space for youth to connect to a variety of supports in a low-pressure environment (Belanger, 2014).

Priority 3

- **Establish a Youth Systems Committee**

Strategic responses and planning seeks to integrate services and approaches across systems and community levels. Establishing a youth systems committee enables for high level planning and implementation and monitoring, and can act as a bridge among all stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

The human and financial costs of homelessness are immense, and without strategic responses or coordinated and collaborative planning and service delivery the consequences are grave.

As a community committed to ending homelessness, we have reimagined our responses by shifting thinking away from managing homelessness towards focusing upon strategic and integrated planning, investing in Housing First, and prioritizing supports and prevention.

Provincially, we continue to move forward with frameworks that guide our work and propel us to work in true collaboration through legislation, such as the *Social Policy Framework* and *Children First*, and through the implementation of *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, and the provincial youth plan: *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness*. As a city, we are also guided by *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness*. At the community level, Homeward Trust's work is

guided by Edmonton's *Community Plan on Housing and Supports: 2011-2015*.

While great progress has been made in achieving our goal of ending homelessness through the ten

The longer a youth remains homeless, the greater the probability of entrenchment in street lifestyle, disconnection from main stream services, sexual exploitation, victimization from crime, violence and poor health (Gaetz, 2014).

year plans, we must follow in the steps of other communities who have increased attention towards youth homelessness by developing a youth-specific homelessness strategy.

Research tells us that effective strategies must respond to the specific needs and underlying causes of homelessness. This is particularly true for youth, as the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are similar, yet distinct from those that define adult homelessness. As such, distinct youth tailored responses are required.



WHY WE NEED A STRATEGY

In Edmonton, youth homelessness is a real and pressing problem that impacts our community across many fronts, from local scales of social cohesion to larger scales of systems and structural issues that come at great financial and human cost. Without specific and adequate supports, youth will continue to cycle through corrections, emergency services and the street, where they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, criminal victimization, and poor health and education (Gaetz, 2011).

Commitment to strategic planning and coordination of resources will stem both the financial and human costs of homelessness; therefore, we have an urgent responsibility to enhance the system of care, increase attention to prevention, and develop clear strategies for coordinated housing and supports services.

We know that youth homelessness requires specific approaches different from adult homelessness

- Youth are developing emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically.
- Many youth enter into homelessness from conflict in the family and home.
- Youth are served by a distinct infrastructure involving separate systems of justice, education, health and child protection/welfare.
- Many youth enter into homelessness with little or no work experience.
- Youth experience high levels of criminal victimization.
- Youth have a lack of basic life skills.
- Youth under 18 years of age have distinct legal entitlements and restrictions (Gaetz, 2011).



Young people who become homeless are plunged into adulthood without the appropriate time and supports required for a healthy transition, which is compounded by adolescent experimentation, and which, without skills and knowledge, can result in adverse consequences and continued cycles of homelessness (Gaetz, 2014; Youth Out Loud, 2014). Equipping youth with the skills necessary to navigate independence and the roles and responsibilities of adulthood is imperative. Successful building blocks to healthy transitions to adulthood can be drawn from Developmental Assets, which link to the larger approach of Positive Youth Development (Search Institute, 1990, Lerner, 2005, Benson, et al., 2006). Such assets include:

Supportive Adult Relationships | Caring School Climate | Family Support | Youth Empowerment and Engagement | Community Service | Behaviour Modelling | Expectations | Involvement in Creative and Recreational Activities | School Engagement | Incorporating Values of Integrity, Responsibility, Restraint | Planning and Decision Making | Cultural Competence | Conflict Resolution | Sense of Purpose | Self- Esteem | Personal Power

WHY WE NEED A STRATEGY

RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

Developing and implementing a youth homelessness strategy enables Edmonton as a community to focus on our strengths, bolster active participation amongst all stakeholders, and embrace new ideas that allow our community to rebalance our responses to youth homelessness (Gaetz, 2014). These shifts offer the opportunity to challenge counter-productive measures and approaches, such as over reliance on emergency responses and mechanisms that support the criminalization of homelessness. While emergency services are necessary for any community, they cannot act as the primary system. Ending homelessness requires sustainable, long term approaches that are supported by integrated and collaborative systems delivery and community level resourcing that prioritizes prevention and housing and supports. In Edmonton, the adoption of Housing First has already shifted our way of thinking and has laid the foundation for new responses.

CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Across Canada, shifts in public policy and use of laws and practices that limit the rights and activities of individuals without shelter have resulted in the criminalization of homelessness (Research Hub, 2015; Gaetz, 2014). Homeless individuals are being marginalized by legislation and public policies that exclude and delimit full participation in citizenship, access to public spaces, and participation in informal labour such as panhandling and squeegeeing (Research Hub, 2015). As homelessness becomes more visible, law enforcement becomes a central component of the emergency response, which often results in homeless individuals receiving fines and/or incarceration (O’Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2011). Research shows, however, that criminalization measures do not effectively address the social and structural causes of homelessness; rather, these temporary interventions can create barriers to obtaining employment, housing and support services (National Law Centre on Homelessness & Poverty, 2009).

In respect to youth, research indicates that youth and law enforcement interactions are extremely high and more frequently negative interactions. To address these processes and practices, research calls for increased collaboration and partnerships between systems level bodies/agencies and the homeless serving sector.

As a group, street youth generally hold negative opinions of the police, based on the perception – and indeed, in many cases their experience – that the police and justice system in general, treat them unfairly. These negative attitudes are grounded in a widely held belief that they are targeted for police action because they are young and homeless. Many street youth express a not unjustified belief that domiciled youth in general do not receive this sort of attention. (O’Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2011, p. 77)

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

When we think about ending youth homelessness there are some big questions that come up. What does ending youth homelessness mean? What does this look like at a local scale? What exactly do we mean when we say homeless youth? What are the pathways into youth homelessness? What is the scope of youth homelessness in Edmonton? To answer these questions, we must frame our discussion within a common language and understanding, beginning with the underlying conditions and circumstances of youth homelessness. As a starting point, we begin by defining homelessness.

At the broadest scale *homelessness* is defined as:

“The situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.”

(Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2012, p.1)

Typology outlining the varying degrees of homelessness and housing security:

*“**Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure and finally, **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.”* (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2012, p.1)

At a closer scale, *youth homelessness* is defined as:

“Those Albertans who are between the ages of 13 and 24 and: Are without a permanent place of residence; Live on the street, in shelters or in places that are not intended or suitable for permanent residence; Are “couch-surfing”, or temporarily living with others for short periods of time.” (Government of Alberta, 2015, p.7)

TYOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS

While initial development of this community strategy prioritized youth engaged in high-risk behaviours, we have expanded the scope to encompass a broader frame that addresses all homeless youth in our community; this is an approach that is inclusive and aligns with feedback from community and agency consultations. However, it remains important to better understand the localized conditions and challenges that youth engaged in high-risk behaviours face. To this end, this strategy includes a typology of characteristics of youth engaged in high-risk behaviours drawn from *Edmonton and Area Children and Youth Services*.

Research tells us that these youth are often disconnected, have few if any family supports, are apprehensive of trusting adults, are difficult to engage, are slow to changing individual practices and boundaries, and are highly vulnerable (Smyth & Eaton-Erikson, 2009). Characteristics include:

- Use of drugs and/or alcohol seems to be interfering with day to day functioning.
- The choices they are making may jeopardize their safety (including where they are living and with whom they are associating).
- They cannot identify a healthy adult in their lives outside of the professional community.
- The youth struggles with authority figures and has few, if any, people they can trust.
- There have been multiple placements or the youth is unwilling to stay in an “approved placement.”
- There have been multiple file closures due to lack of follow through by the youth.
- The youth is involved with, or at-risk for sexual exploitation, including survival sex.
- Multi-generational involvement with child and youth services.
- Struggle with mental health disorders and are living an unpredictable, day-to-day existence.

AGE MATTERS

Establishing a youth age range allows us as a community of stakeholders to create a shared language to better address the needs of Edmonton’s homeless youth population. In alignment with provincial guides, this report **defines youth as 13-24 years of age**. However, we must take into consideration the vast differences, circumstances and development of youth within this broad age range.



We must also consider the significant differences around statutory responsibilities associated with certain ages where the government defines ages for children in care, types of mental health supports, welfare and income supports, education and other government benefits that are available (Gaetz, 2014).

TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS

In addition to developmental and jurisdictional differences, another challenge to developing effective responses to youth homelessness is the range of needs and acuity of challenges that youth face (Gaetz, 2011; Gaetz, 2014). Research indicates that while responses must be tailored to meet the needs of youth, these responses themselves must be further specified to reflect the differences in factors that caused youth to leave home. Additionally, the level and types of supports required for youth to exit street life must accurately reflect and differentiate between youth experiencing short term homelessness from those who are chronically homeless (CPRN, 2009; Gaetz, 2014). This report draws upon the work of Dr. Stephen Gaetz and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) by including the NAEH typology of youth homelessness (NAEH, 2012):

Temporarily Disconnected

A majority of people experience homelessness for a short period of time, navigating their way out of homelessness without much assistance and rarely return to homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness suggests that between 81% and 86% of homeless youth fit into this category (NAEH, 2012).

Generally, characteristics of this group of youth include:

Younger | Stable connections or potentials for reconnections with family | Likely to remain in school | Minimal history with homelessness

Research shows that for this group, prevention efforts and early intervention are critical to successfully diverting this population away from the homelessness system (Gaetz, 2014).

Unstably Connected

Generally, characteristics of this group of youth include:

Complex housing history | Repeated episodes of homelessness | Disengaged from school | Challenges with employment | Some connections with family | Less experience with serious mental health and addictions

Research indicates that family mediation alongside a range of housing options are recommended strategies towards addressing homelessness for this group of youth (Gaetz, 2014).

Chronically Disconnected

Typically, this is the smallest group of homeless youth; however, this group has the most complex needs and reliance on the homelessness system.

Generally, characteristics of this group of youth include:

Longer term homelessness | More experience with serious mental health and addictions or diagnosed disabilities | Unstable and no connections with family

Research indicates that this group of youth require comprehensive supports and interventions alongside permanently supportive and long term housing (Gaetz, 2014).

SETTING THE CONTEXT

THE SCOPE OF HOMELESSNESS

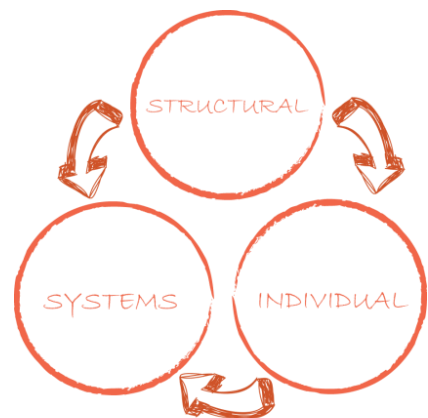
Across the country, communities are dealing with the serious and challenging issue of youth homelessness. A Raising the Roof report approximates that 65,000 youth are homeless across the nation, a number arguably conservative in scope, particularly given the issue of hidden homeless within the youth population. In the Coming of Age report, it is estimated that around 20% of shelter users are independent youth between the ages of 16-25, and a further 1% are under 16, meaning that there are approximately 6000 homeless youth on any given night.



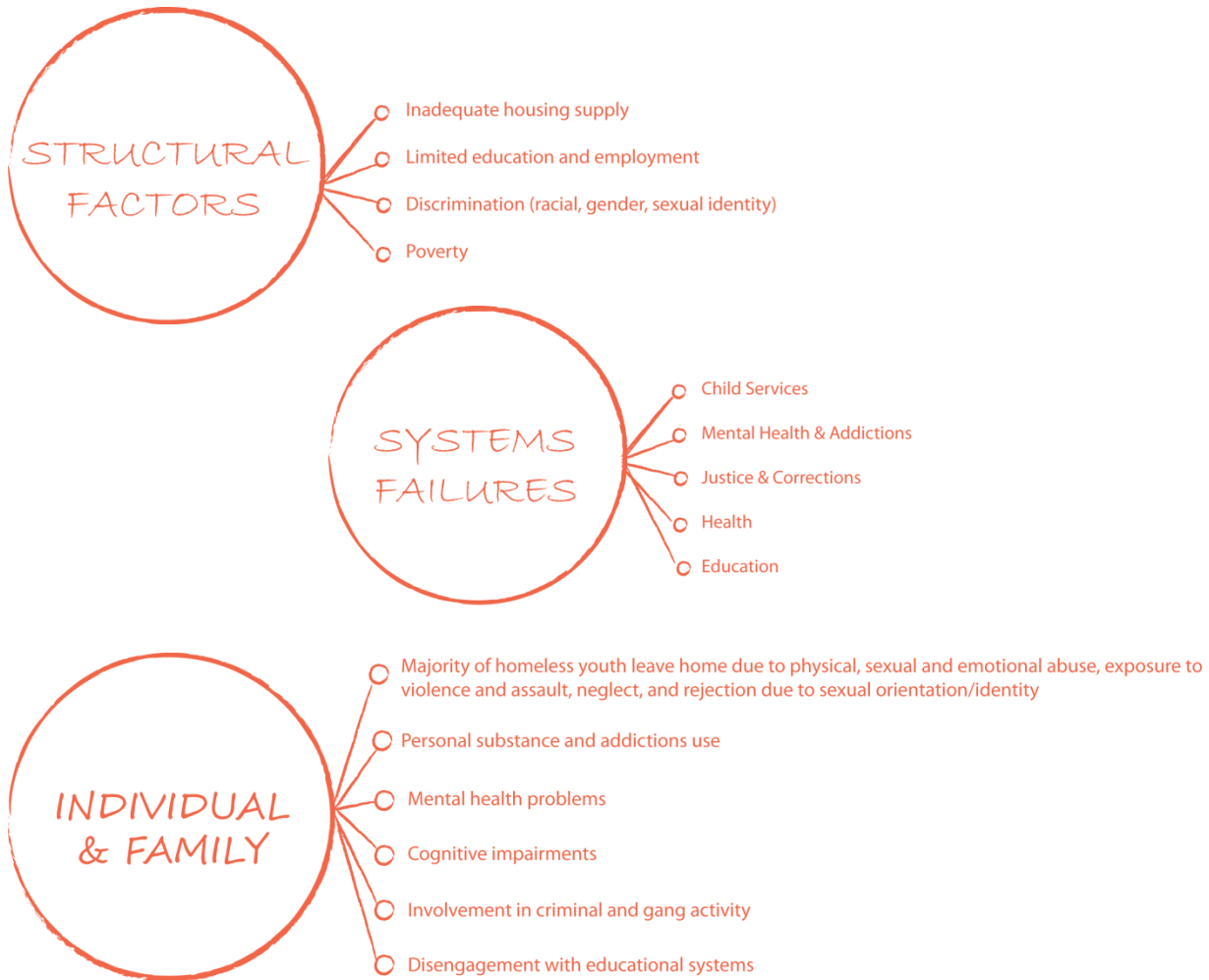
Provincially, there are an estimated 840 homeless youth in Alberta (2006 Homeless and Shelter Counts, Government of Alberta, Human Services). In Edmonton, 240 youth were counted in the 2014 Homeless Count (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2014 Homeless Count Report). It is important to note that these numbers may not accurately reflect the youth homeless population, given that point in time counts provide a snapshot and may not capture those who do not enter the shelter system, who are sleeping rough or those who are temporarily staying with friends (couch surfers).

PATHWAYS TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

As this report has suggested, there are key distinctions between adult homelessness and youth homelessness, including the diversity of factors that contribute to the circumstances of youth homelessness. To approach youth homelessness, we must understand the multiple and interconnected pathways into youth homelessness. Research informs us that, generally, the pathways centre around three broad categories: individual/family problems; structural factors; and systems failures (Gaetz, 2010). Below is a broad overview of the complex causes of youth homelessness (Gaetz, 2010; Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter & Gulliver, 2013; Gaetz, 2014).



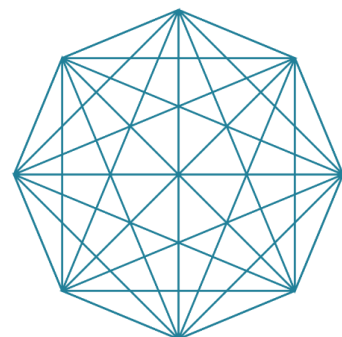
SETTING THE CONTEXT



COMMON THREADS

Qualitative research studies tell us that while there are many different factors and circumstances that contribute to youth homelessness, there are also common threads and experiences shared by homeless youth:

- Difficulty maintaining housing
- Barriers to accessing appropriate services
- Foster care, group homes or youth centres
- Mental health & addictions issues
- Challenges with maintaining employment
- Lack of positive role models and relationships



ABORIGINAL HOMELESSNESS

While current research on Aboriginal youth homelessness is limited, advocates have suggested that “the rate of homelessness for this population is dramatically increasing” (Baskins, 2007, p. 32). Therefore, it is essential to gain an understanding of the complexities and the many factors that contribute to Aboriginal homelessness.

Research suggests that indigenous homelessness is an act of colonization, in which colonialism is a constantly lived experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Makokis, Bodor, Friesen, 2013; Alfred, 2009). While the term colonialism is most often understood as a practice of the past, it is vital to recognize that colonialism is ongoing today through economic and structural policies and practices. Understanding colonialism and its continuing effects on individuals today, is essential when consulting and working with Indigenous communities.

“Homelessness is a result of colonizing policies and practices that have been forced upon Indigenous people across Turtle Island. The colonial process haunts both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, as the impact of governments actions continue to be seen in the guises of many “social problems” such as homelessness. Unfortunately many negative social conditions have become internalized and normalized in Indigenous communities...Literature suggests that Indigenous experiences of homelessness have common pathways or cultural experiences that have occurred historically and continue today. These pathways are unique from the non-Indigenous experience of homelessness because they stem from the process of colonization, assimilation, and dislocation” (Makokis et al., 2013, p. 6).

Experiences of Aboriginal youth populations in Alberta, and more specifically Edmonton, are not removed from these experiences. Many youth have histories tied to intergenerational trauma associated with the legacy of colonialism, the residential school system, the Sixty’s Scoop, and the child welfare system. As a result of cultural displacement, many youth’s connections to and interpretation of their Aboriginal culture and spiritual beliefs may vary (Resource Assistance for Youth, 2014). Therefore, addressing the effects of colonialism must include the promotion of community through cultural practices and inclusivity.

Recommended key components for organizations working with Aboriginal youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness include (Resource Assistance for Youth, 2014):

1. Youth-centered, youth-driven, youth-focused and tailoring to individual needs
2. Culturally Competent, focusing on staff training around intergenerational traumas and colonialism, alignment with Aboriginal teachings, and partnerships with Aboriginal communities
3. Evidence-based programming including integration of services, harm reduction and Housing First with supports
4. Evaluation of services and consultation with Aboriginal youth

LOCAL CHALLENGES

BANNING POLICIES

High risk and homeless youth have few places that they are welcomed to spend their time; exclusionary practices, such as banning policies, have significant and often negative impacts on the lives of youth. Banning policies typically enforce order and adherence to regulations within a particular organization/site. Rather than overarching laws enacted through by-laws or law enforcement, banning policies are generally determined by each organization/site. For many organizations/sites, banning policies reflect safety conditions or regulations for staff and users. Community recommendations suggest utilizing trauma informed practices in implementing bans and creating ban policies, coordinating follow up after bans, providing youth referrals to appropriate services, and establishing mechanisms or an appeal process for youth to address bans they feel are unfair. Further research into banning practices and policies, including policy development, implementation and dissemination is recommended.

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

Homeless youth face significant barriers to accessing public transportation; this impacts their lives across multiple fronts, particularly around connectedness and social inclusion/exclusion. While previous research has examined social exclusion in relation to housing and employment, access to transportation has attracted less attention (Jocoy & Del Casino, 2010). Safe, reliable, and accessible transportation systems are indispensable for maintaining stable housing, paid employment and social networks; hence, they are integral to the promotion of social inclusion among homeless youth (Jocoy & Del Casino, 2010; Carlson et al., 2006). Many barriers to transit include lack of funds for transit fares, accumulated transit fines, and court orders barring individuals from the transit system (Stewart et al., 2013). Research shows that when youth have the means for mobility, they feel more included and a greater sense of belonging in society, thereby enabling them to work on their goals and access services and supports beyond their normal walking range (Stewart et al., 2013).

DIVERSITY AND SUB POPULATIONS

Edmonton's homeless youth population is diverse, and like other communities exhibits an overrepresentation of certain subpopulations. While subpopulations are unique, there is often overlap and intersections amongst the challenges, causes and social conditions experienced by youth. Key youth populations identified by the community include:

- **LGBTQ:** While there are many factors related to LGBTQ youth homelessness, research shows that key reasons for leaving or being forced from the family home include experiences of homophobia and transphobia, which in many cases continues for youth in the shelter system (Abramovich, 2012; Homeless Hub, 2014). Despite the extensive research and specialized support services for youth, there are few specialized support options and housing initiatives across Canada that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth.

LOCAL CHALLENGES

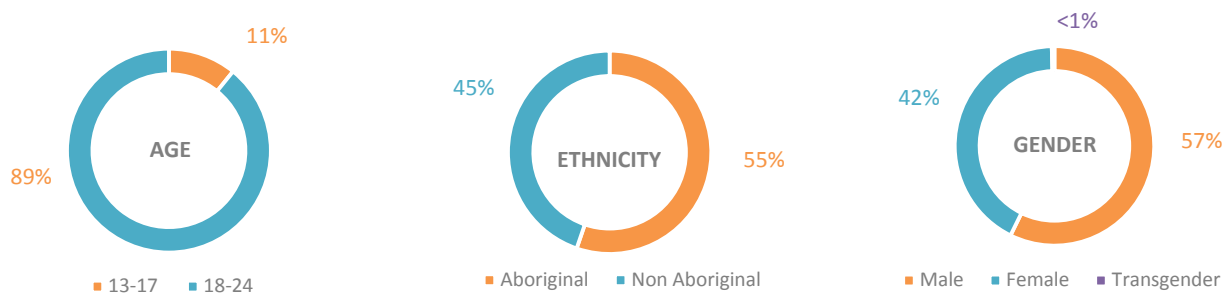
- **GANG INVOLVED:** Cities experiencing rapid urbanization and growth face many complex problems associated with urban realities, including youth gang involvement. Although there is little direct correlation between homeless youth and gangs, research indicates that while gang behaviour is typically outside of the norm for homeless youth, the probability of gang affiliation increases the longer a youth remains street-entrenched and homeless.
- **PREGNANT & PARENTING YOUTH:** On average young women enter street life at an earlier age than men, greatly increasing the risk of sexual and physical victimization (Little, Gorman, Dzendoletas, Moravac, 2007). Research shows that most young pregnancies are unplanned and related to multiple factors, some of which include: limited life choices; desire for unconditional love; a means to access resources and housing; and unresolved grief from childhood trauma and interactions with child welfare agencies (Little et al., 2007). In concert with the multiple realities and conditions of youth homelessness, there are many barriers for pregnant homeless youth: few clinics dedicated to homeless populations; youth feel out of place in mainstream health settings and are untrusting of care providers; lack of identification; limited transportation options; and fear that staff will contact child and family services (Little et al., 2007).
- **SEXUALLY EXPLOITED:** The sexual exploitation of youth can occur to youth of any social and economic background. Many youth who are sexually exploited have experienced some form of physical, mental and sexual abuse and are often homeless and engaged in survival sex (Government of Alberta, Human Services, 2009). Key predisposing factors include: maltreatment at home; parental conflict and/or disruptive homes (addictions, mental health, domestic violence); racism; low self-esteem and self-worth, involvement in criminal activities, and addictions (GOA, Human Services, 2009).
- **NEWCOMER:** Across Canada many immigrants and newcomers are facing increased poverty and barriers to the labour market, which is impacting their economic and social integration (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010). In relation to homelessness, studies indicate that among newcomers homelessness is almost entirely hidden, given that individuals are accessing informal networks to address housing and support needs (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010). Studies indicate that mainstream services are not always accessible to immigrants and newcomers due to inadequate staff training around cultural competency and settlement services, language barriers, and lack of effective coordination between the homelessness sector and settlement services (Access Alliance, 2003).

EDMONTON'S HOMELESS YOUTH

Although traditional point in time counts (PIT) cannot measure the comprehensive picture of homelessness or those at risk of homelessness, PIT counts can be helpful indicators to understand the magnitude of homelessness and allow us to develop a local portrait of homelessness in Edmonton.

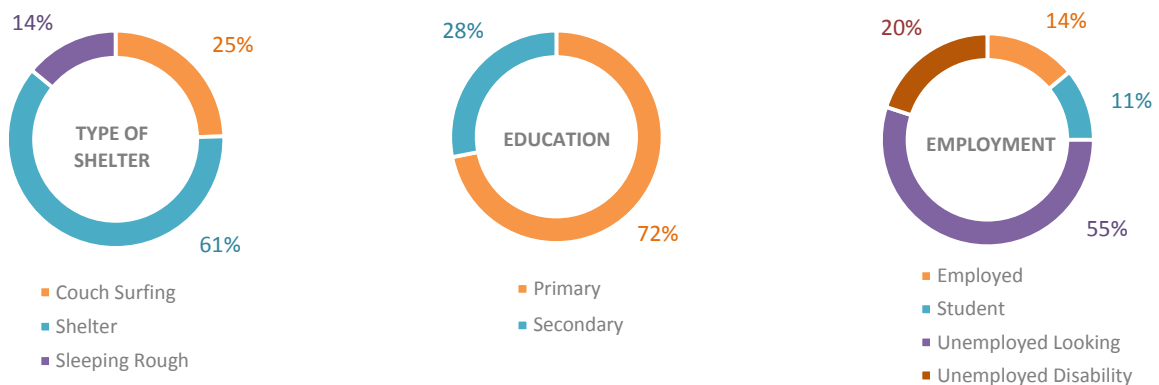
In the October 2014 Homeless Count, **549 homeless children and youth under the age of 25 were counted**. Of this number, **240 were independent youth between the ages 13-24**. Taking into account those who stayed in emergency shelters but did not participate in the Homeless Count survey, there is an estimated total of **340 homeless youth** in Edmonton. Combined with the remaining 309 dependant children under the age of 18 who were reported by homeless parents, children and youth account for approximately **28%** of the total number of homeless Edmontonians.

Statistics from 2014 Homeless Count



While the April 2014 Homeless Connect Survey was not a full homeless count, its data does reveal valuable information about the local homeless youth population. This information is summarized below:

Statistics from Homeless Connect April 2014 (n=101)



DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

In response to the concerns we were hearing around the complex challenges and barriers Edmonton’s youth are facing, we began exploring best evidence research and leading practices on how to adequately and sustainably meet the needs of our community’s youth. Gaetz (2014) has outlined a clear path for assisting communities in their efforts to address youth homelessness, beginning with the development of a youth homelessness plan, creation of integrated systems responses, facilitation of strategic engagement with all stakeholders, adoption of a youth development orientation and research, and data collection and information sharing. From this starting point we began to investigate the best approach to developing a homeless youth strategy, which addresses the needs and conditions of Edmonton’s homeless youth and focuses upon community-level resourcing and integrated cross-systems planning.

Given the vast literature, case studies and homeless youth strategies available, our intent was not to reinvent the wheel, but rather to draw upon those learnings and strategies that would best suit Edmonton’s local contexts and compliment the already existing networks and work that is currently occurring at systems and community levels.



METHODOLOGY

Scoping literature review on homelessness and youth homelessness focusing on UK, Australia, United States and Canada



Criteria

Youth homelessness strategies + conditions + pathways of youth homelessness + integrated/coordinated service delivery + interventions + permanent supportive housing + transitional housing + housing first + coordinated access + supports + common assessment frameworks + positive development approach



Types of research and literature

Academic and grey literature reviewed and compared
Policy documents reviewed – Canada and United States



Local Knowledges

Draws from Edmonton’s homeless serving sector’s existing knowledge and collaborations

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

While research provided an initial starting point, it was imperative that we engage Edmonton's youth homeless serving sector and systems partners, as engagement is an integral component to maintaining focused collaborative action and committed partnerships with local agencies, community, and all orders of government in efforts to end homelessness. Importantly, stakeholder engagement is a guiding principle of this youth strategy.

To support the development of a strategic plan to end youth homelessness and to draw upon the extensive knowledge and experiences of Edmonton's youth serving sector and systems partners, Homeward Trust held two community consultations to exchange learnings, identify gaps and barriers, and to prioritize key areas to focus resources and planning. These consultations provided for robust feedback and recommendations that have been used to guide the development of the *Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton*.

The Scoping Session

An initial Scoping Session was held at the University of Alberta, which was attended by approximately 30 participants. Attendees represented Edmonton's youth serving agencies, systems partners, and provincial government. The key purposes of the event were:

- To validate concerns that youth in high-risk situations are encountering serious gaps at the systems level and misconnections at the community level, and in the end are accessing programs/services not equipped to address their specific needs and conditions;
- To share learnings and help Homeward Trust understand our role in terms of community level resourcing and cross-systems planning;
- To identify clear priorities, strategies and next steps towards developing a strategy for addressing homeless youth in high-risk situations; and
- To strengthen collaboration between community and systems partners.

Key Findings

Overarching participant discussion highlighted key themes that focused on: housing and supports, prevention and sustainability and integrated system of care. The recommendations have been categorized into these three themes and synthesized for succinctness, allowing for clearer identification of priorities. The extended summary of the scoping session can be found in the Appendices.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Housing & Supports

Overarching feedback indicated the need to develop clear pathways and transitions along the continuum of housing options for youth, including access to long term and appropriate services and supports based upon the needs and acuity of the youth. Importantly, care plans should be developed from strengths/relationship-based approaches that include harm reduction and trauma informed practice and which are ultimately youth centered.

Prevention & Sustainability

Overarching feedback indicated the need to enhance Aboriginal perspectives and historical contexts in prevention mechanisms that utilize cultural safety and competency practices. Increased education and awareness campaigns in schools and wider public awareness around the pathways and complex issues of youth homelessness, with increased attention to the challenges faced by LGBTQ self-identified youth, newcomers, gang involved, and sexually exploited youth. Achieving sustainable efforts requires long term resource allocation and collaboration amongst all stakeholders.

Integrated System of Care

Overarching feedback indicated the necessity to maintain and strengthen collaborative partnerships between systems and community partners. Recommendation also focused on exploring ways to bridge the supports and funding gaps between youth in care and youth not in care.

Immediate Priorities

- Youth-only warming centres to offer provision of basic services/needs for youth, including warm clothing, winter gear, food, first aid, showers, laundry and personal storage
- Single point of entry concept – key network and resource hub for youth to connect to addiction and mental health services, supports and shelter or short term accommodation, housing and linkages to programming offered by community and government based providers
- Enhance staff training (client centered – youth driven, child development approaches, relationship-based approaches, trauma informed, harm reduction) and knowledge sharing
- Adopt universal harm reduction approach

The Community Planning Session

In follow up to the Scoping Session, a larger Community Planning Session was held at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. Approximately 70 participants were in attendance, representing community organizations, Edmonton-wide youth serving agencies, Alberta Health Services, housing agencies, City of Edmonton and departments from the Government of Alberta. The key purposes of the event were:

- To build upon increasing coordination and collaboration amongst all systems and community partners;

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

- To provide feedback and recommendations on a preliminary strategy to address the housing, support, and service coordination needs of high-risk homeless youth; and
- To share learnings and help Homeward Trust understand our role in terms of community level resourcing and cross-systems planning.

The engagement process for the Community Planning Session utilized the “Fishbowl Process” to foster rich and interactive dialogue. A panel of six local experts, mediated by a facilitator, engaged in discussion prompted by questions around priorities and challenges for Edmonton’s homeless youth engaged in high-risk behaviours. The principle questions focused on: 1) What could integration across systems and services look like? 2) What is successfully working to support youth in high-risk situations? 3) What is not working? What is getting in the way? 4) Where are the gaps or disconnects? 5) What should we, as a community focus on first?

Key Findings

Overarching participant discussion highlighted key themes that focused on: housing and supports, prevention, sustainability, integrated systems planning, information sharing and mobilization, Family First, Harm Reduction and development of a community hub for youth. To align with recommendations from the scoping session, the recommendations have been categorized into the three themes of housing and supports, prevention and sustainability, and integrated system of care. The extended summary of the scoping session can be found in the Appendices.

Housing & Supports

Overarching feedback indicated the need to increase affordable housing, in conjunction with increases in units of congregate supportive housing and scattered site housing. Recommendations reinforce the need for clear pathways and transitions along the continuum of housing options for youth, including access to long term and appropriate services and supports based upon the needs and acuity of the youth.

Prevention & Sustainability

Overarching feedback indicated the need for all stakeholders to adopt universal harm reduction approaches and enhance education and awareness around the causes of homelessness, with a focus on family breakdown, trauma and mental health, and addictions. Recommendations also suggested targeted prevention and educational programming for parenting youth, sexually exploited, gang involved, LGBTQ, newcomers and Aboriginal youth. A focus on sustainability and the need for long term investments and funding was also recommended.

Integrated System of Care

Overarching feedback indicated the need to redefine ‘high-risk’ youth, as this labelling causes stigma. There is also need to recognize the collaboration occurring in the sector and to maintain collaboration as a priority.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Recommendations also included a focus on coordinated access and streamlining navigation and flow for youth through health, justice and education systems, and incorporating youth perspectives at policy and planning tables.

Immediate Priorities

- Community Youth Hub
- Winter warming centres – increase youth safe places
- Agencies to meet to understand what each agency specialized in and services offered, which will identify gaps and areas to focus resources
- Focus on prevention and early intervention
- Define who agencies are triaging

YOUTH CONSULTATION

In addition to the community consultations, a youth consultation was held to give Edmonton's youth an opportunity to express their perspectives and ideas and share their experiences of homelessness. These opinions complement the research, community priorities and, importantly, inform the recommendations within this community strategy.

The Youth Consultation Session was held at the Edmonton Public Library - Stanley A. Milner branch and was attended by 21 participants. The recruitment process occurred through youth serving agencies, the Edmonton Public Library (Stanley Milner) and word of mouth. The key purposes of the consultation were:

- To collaborate and engage with youth;
- To provide the opportunity for youth to share feedback and perspectives on homelessness, housing and support services in Edmonton.

The consultation aimed to establish a respectful and inclusive environment where youth felt comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas of how to address youth homelessness. To foster rich dialogue, participants were divided into four groups that were facilitated by Homeward Trust staff members. To frame the discussions, the following questions were asked in each of the four groups:

1. What has stopped you from getting housing, healthcare, legal aid, school, and jobs?
2. What has helped you get housing, healthcare, legal aid, school and jobs?
3. In a perfect world, what do we need to end youth homelessness?

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

Key Findings

Prevention & Sustainability

Overarching feedback indicated the need to increase education and awareness around the pathways into youth homelessness, with a focus on family breakdown, trauma, mental health and addictions, and more broadly the daily realities/challenges that homeless youth encounter. Recommendations also suggested targeted prevention and educational programming at schools and agencies. Long term investments and funding for youth was also recommended.

Housing & Supports

Overarching feedback indicated the need to increase housing options for youth, particularly congregate supportive housing and scattered site housing with supports for daily living and skills development. Recommendations reinforce the need for clear pathways and transitions along the continuum of housing options for youth, including access to long term and appropriate services and supports based upon the needs and acuity of the youth.

Integrated System of Care

Overarching feedback indicated the need for systems partners, namely health, justice and education, to develop streamlined processes and pathways to services and programming. Recommendations focused on the necessity for including the youth perspective and experience at policy and planning tables.

Immediate Priorities

- Housing options and availability
- Community Youth Hub
- Agencies and systems partners to align overall objectives focused on ending and addressing youth homelessness
- Transparent and inclusive programming that is youth centred and relationship-based
- Youth engagement and empowerment



*We need to look
through a new*

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

STRATEGY

The following strategy outlines streams of activity for addressing the needs of homeless youth with the objective of achieving the following outcomes: safe, secure, stable housing; long term connections to supports; improved wellbeing; education; and employment. From this strategy, planning focuses upon a framework that highlights effective coordination and integration of services, prevention and sustainability, and appropriate housing and supports for the city’s most vulnerable youth. Within this strategy there are four key nodes of work:

1. Review existing resources and services, systems and community level gaps, and best evidence research
2. Research integrated data management and sharing between community partners
 - a. Coordination of data management and data sharing
 - b. Evaluation and measurement of data
3. Develop a framework that addresses the unique needs of youth
 - a. Refinement of framework based upon data, community and systems consultations, and promising practices
 - b. Coordination of strategies and increased integration of service planning and delivery
 - c. Evaluation of framework
4. Implementation of strategies

PHASES	TARGETS
PHASE I	Review Research Develop
PHASE II	Refine Consultation Coordination
PHASE III	Implementation
PHASE IV	Evaluation

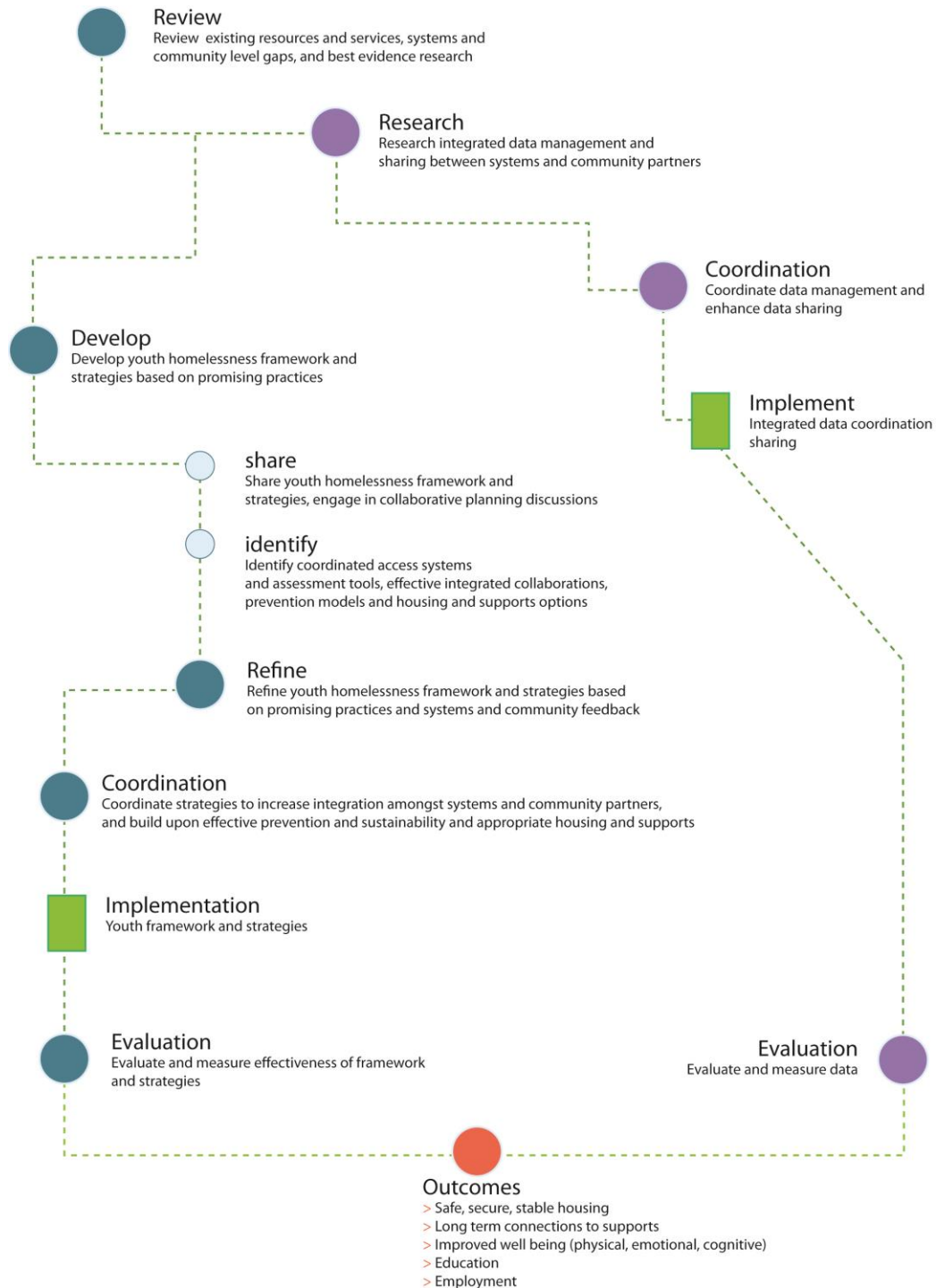
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

An effective strategy requires constant evolution and adaptation to respond to transformations at systems and community levels, changes in government, availabilities of resources, and shifting capacities within the sector. Planning and monitoring are essential to ensuring effectiveness and for measuring success.

GOALS	STRATEGIES
PLANNING	Action planning Fund development
MONITOR & EVALUATION	Localized research Youth point in time count
	Develop an evaluation matrix Data collection and information management

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGY

STRATEGY FLOW



CORE PRINCIPLES

The provincial and municipal ten year plans recommend that all efforts to end homelessness be based upon common principles. This community strategy is guided by:

Housing First Approach

Since 2009, Homeward Trust has shifted our approach to ending homelessness through the implementation of the Housing First program, focusing resources towards permanent housing and coordinated supports. We have successfully housed 3,500 individuals in permanent housing with appropriate supports, thereby assisting individuals to achieve independence or permanent supportive housing. The success of Housing First works upon the premise that everyone has the right to safe, secure and stable housing without any preconditions of readiness, and is supported through case planning and assessments of needs. While Housing First is successful for adults, can it work for youth?

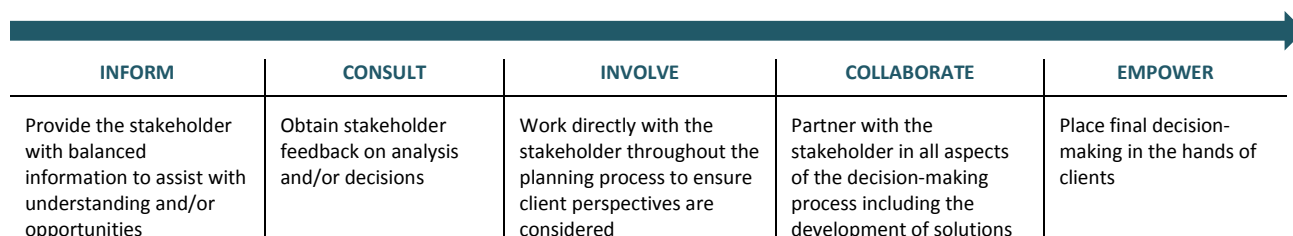
Drawing upon the work of Dr. Stephen Gaetz’s Housing First Youth Framework (2014), Housing First can be an effective intervention for youth through appropriate adaptations that meet the needs of youth. Importantly, different models of accommodation are required, including transitional housing options. The focus of supports must be youth oriented, building on life skills development, meaningful engagement, access to education and employment, and strengthening social relations. The guiding principles for a Youth Housing First framework include (Gaetz, 2014):

- Immediate access to housing with no preconditions
- Youth choice and self determination
- Positive Youth Development Orientation
- Individualized and Client Driven Supports
- Social and Community Integration

Stakeholder Engagement

Homelessness cannot be solved by any one organization; it requires coordinated responses from all levels of government, systems and community partners. “Homelessness is a fusion policy issue. It must necessarily involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare” (Gaetz, 2014). As a principle, the process of stakeholder engagement draws upon the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) model of engagement.

INCREASING LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT



INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Provide the stakeholder with balanced information to assist with understanding and/or opportunities	Obtain stakeholder feedback on analysis and/or decisions	Work directly with the stakeholder throughout the planning process to ensure client perspectives are considered	Partner with the stakeholder in all aspects of the decision-making process including the development of solutions	Place final decision-making in the hands of clients

CORE PRINCIPLES

Homeward Trust is committed to meaningful and authentic engagement processes that encourage collaborative dialogue and innovative responses. Our efforts will be guided by principles that reflect our organizational values and support effective engagement.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Commitment to ongoing evaluation and improvement of the engagement process
- Allocating appropriate resources for effective engagement
- Keeping current with evidence based practices in stakeholder engagement

TRANSPARENCY

- Providing clearly defined expectations
- Providing a clear process on decision-making
- Ensuring openness and candor in all aspects of our work

EQUITY & INCLUSIVENESS

- Connecting with and encouraging individuals to become involved in housing and homelessness issues affecting their lives
- Seeking out diverse voices and experiences
- Providing culturally safe, relevant and responsive environments and tools

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Using lived experiences and those of others for process improvement and change management
- Promoting knowledge development and mobilization
- Using best evidence research to inform daily operational work

RESPECT

- The perspectives and choices of individuals and the broader community are listened to and valued
- Demonstrate fairness, dignity and compassion
- Respecting the time and resources of individuals and the community

COMMUNICATION

- Ensuring opportunities for open and collaborative dialogue
- Providing timely and accessible information
- Using plain and accessible language in all communication materials
- Provide education focused on person centered planning

Positive Youth Development Orientation

An essential component to effective responses to youth homelessness is the Positive Youth Development approach, which replaces the deficit view of adolescence with a strengths-based perspective that focuses upon enhancing the social, cognitive, psychological and physical wellbeing of adolescents (Lerner, 2005). Building upon strategies that focus on a comprehensive approach of transitioning to adulthood and improved wellbeing are imperative mechanisms of an effective youth homelessness strategy. Importantly, Positive Youth Development provides a frame to support the opportunities youth require to empower themselves, form meaningful relationships with adults, build skills, develop leadership and contribute to their community (National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth, 2001). Positive Youth Development can be conceptualized through six “Cs” – Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring and Contribution. Importantly, the promotion of Positive Youth Development is an effective tool to minimize adolescent risk behaviours (Lerner, 2005).

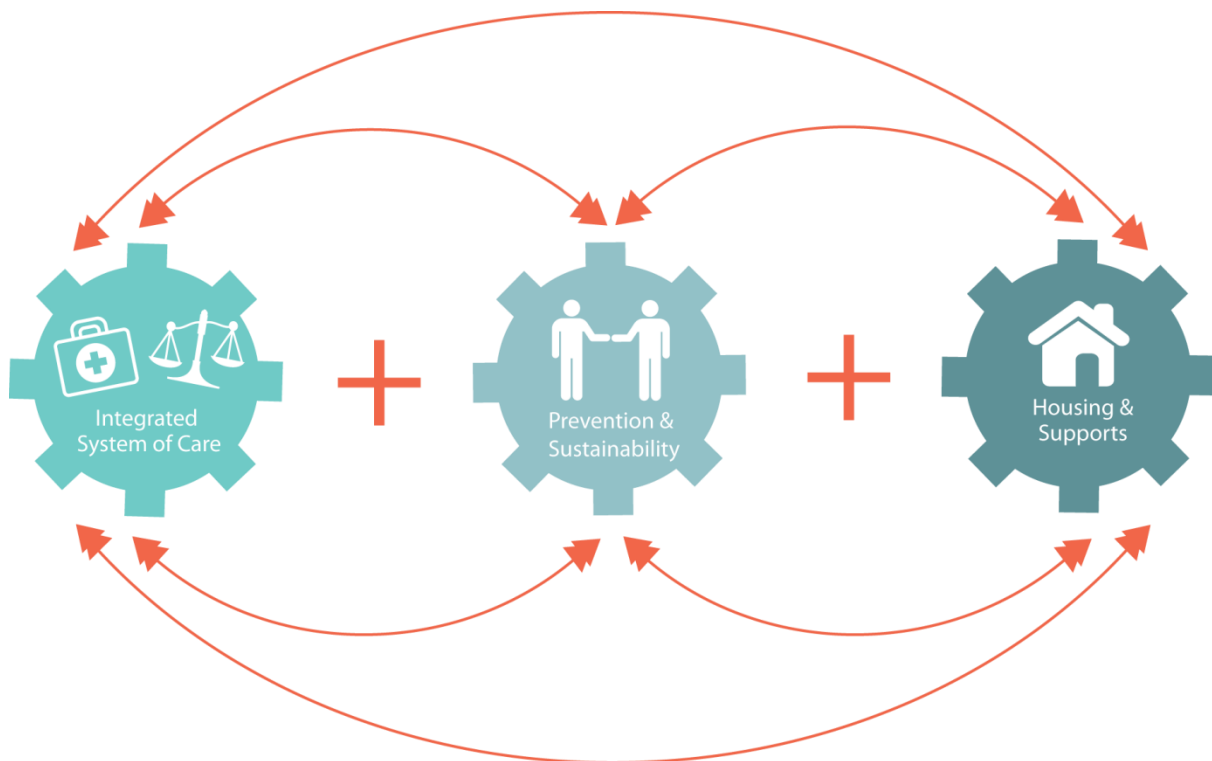
CORE PRINCIPLES

Individualized and Youth Centered Supports

Simply defined, youth centered supports means that youth are engaged throughout all levels of planning, implementation, and evaluation in a meaningful and productive manner (Nova Scotia Public Health Services, 2009). Youth centered supports are built upon the idea that all young people are unique, as are their needs. Support options and service delivery should embrace individualized responses throughout the system of care that are flexible in relation to timeframes, adaptable based upon the changing needs of youth, and culturally appropriate.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

This strategic framework was developed to direct our efforts towards ending youth homelessness in Edmonton. The framework has three interconnected strategies; within each strategy is a list of recommendations that are outlined in the following pages.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

STRATEGY 1 INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF CARE

Systems integration is broadly defined as the provision of services that concentrates upon coordination, communication, trust and respect amongst all stakeholders, with the goal of collaboratively working together to achieve common objectives (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2010). A system of care recognizes that different agencies or systems have specific roles and mandates, but that rather than operating as a fragmented collection of services, a collaborative approach that holistically serves the needs of the individual is needed. Therefore, an integrated system of care is a local system that addresses the needs of individuals through the coordination and integration of programs, services and resources from planning through to delivery. Importantly, an integrated system of care requires a youth centered model, in which youth are active participants in the planning, delivery and evaluation of programs and services specific to their needs (North Carolina Families Inc., 2006).

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

Coordination of activities of youth serving agencies & systems partners

Coordination of activities within the youth serving sector is an effective way to facilitate interagency and systems integration, knowledge exchange and optimization of resources. A successful mechanism that supports coordination of activities is an outcome based measurement system, which increases accountability, effective services, and freedom for communities to design flexible service delivery to meet the needs of youth (CCHRC, 2002). Notably, adoption of an outcome based measurement system increases cooperative efforts to attain common outcomes and rewards, thereby reducing fragmentation within the sector. The resultant effect is creative options for action with focused outcomes (CCHRC, 2002).

Promising Practices

- Develop shared objectives, indicators and outcome measures for the system of care with a transparent accountability process (Juneck and Thompson, 1999; Gaetz, 2011)
- Develop outcome measurements that address and reflect high-risk behaviours and situations (Juneck and Thompson, 1999)
- Collection of measurements and progress reporting conducted at regular intervals (Juneck and Thompson, 1999)
- Develop incentive structures within the system of care to facilitate the change process of services providers and organizations (Juneck and Thompson, 1999)
- Enable the system of care to explore creative solutions to manage service delivery, reduce duplication and induce greater cooperation (Juneck and Thompson, 1999)
- Adopt a commonly accepted definition of youth homelessness (Gaetz, 2011)

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Promising Responses

Street Youth Planning Collaborative, Hamilton, Ontario

The SYPC is a multilayered committee, comprised of leadership from youth serving agencies, frontline staff and youth that work towards collective planning, integrated service delivery and comprehensive services. The guiding philosophy of the committee is to support healthy adolescent transitions to adulthood through agency collaboration with one another when serving youth. Specific or program successes of the project include the Youth Opportunities Strategy, the development of two transitional housing projects, front-line worker training, an Early Intervention Project, and the At Risk Checklist and Couch Project.

High-risk Youth Conference 2014, Edmonton, Alberta

This High-risk Youth Conference was held in Edmonton on May 12-13, 2014. It brought together youth, service providers, researchers, and systems stakeholders to focus on the dynamics, barriers, issues and increasingly complex needs of high-risk youth. Agency staff from Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services, Alberta Health Services Addiction and Mental Health, Edmonton John Howard Society, E4C, MacEwan University, Justice and Solicitor General (Youth Probation and Edmonton Young Offenders Centre), Old Strathcona Youth Society, iHuman Youth Society, Boyle Street Community Services, YESS, McMan, and Edmonton Police Services working with high-risk youth came together to plan the conference. The format consisted of two days of discussion on theory and practice that encompassed the knowledge and methodology of harm reduction, attachment theory, trauma and brain development, relationship-based practice, and resiliency/strength-based approaches to serving High-risk Youth. The conference offered workshops from multiple disciplines and involved youth contributions as ambassadors, emcees, speakers, entertainment, and art showcases.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2

Establish collective principles and values

A system of care is predicated upon shared principles and collective efforts to support youth successfully transitioning into adulthood and independence. While organizations have specified mandates and directives, it is essential that there is a common understanding of values and purpose that recognize the contributions and value of all members, as no single organization or systems partner can end homelessness alone (Compassion Capital Fund, 2010; Gaetz, 2014). Ideally, core principles guide the system of care and are adopted into daily operations, helping to guide actions and lend focus to systems of care work. When establishing shared principles and values it is critical that they reflect youth development and support comprehensive wellbeing and transitions to adulthood (CCHRC, 2002; Youth Out Loud, 2013).

Promising Practices

- Work from innovation and productive change (Gaetz, 2014)
- Establish strong feedback loops and effective communication at all levels of partnerships through

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

knowledge and information sharing (CCF, 2010)

- Ensure clarity of purpose and shared decision making processes (CCF, 2010)
- Acknowledge the existence of separate organizational aims and objectives and their connection to jointly agreed upon aims and objectives (CCF, 2010)
- Ensure partnerships are able to sustain a level of trust when faced with external problems that inhibit the contribution of individual partners (CCF, 2010)
- Access to resources (human and financial) through commitments of institutional partners (CCF,2010)

Promising Responses

United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Opening Doors Plan, Washington, DC

Opening Doors is the United States comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. The plan outlines an interagency collaboration that aligns mainstream housing, health, education and human services. The foundational principles of Opening Doors include:

- Homelessness is unacceptable
- There are no homeless people, but rather people who have lost their homes who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- Homelessness is expensive; it is better to invest in solutions
- Homelessness is solvable; we have learned a lot about what works
- Homelessness can be prevented
- There is strength in collaboration

Government of Alberta, A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years, Edmonton, Alberta

The Plan for Alberta is based on the work done by Alberta's communities to end homelessness and is a plan that supports their efforts, reflecting the strong commitment, investment and shared vision on the part of government, communities and citizens. The guiding principles for A Plan for Alberta include:

- Everyone has access to safe, affordable, permanent housing
- Addressing root causes of homelessness is essential to ending homelessness
- Preventing and ending homelessness is a shared responsibility of all orders of government, the community, the corporate sector, service providers, and citizens
- Programs and services are evidence-informed in their planning and demonstrate measurable outcomes
- Current essential services and supports are maintained during the transition to permanent housing
- Goals and initiatives are client centered and community driven

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

RECOMMENDATION 1.3

Establish a coordinated access and assessment strategy

Coordinated Access and Assessment is a system-wide program designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable first (triaging) by assessing an individual's current situation, acuity of their needs, and services they are currently receiving. There are generally two models of coordinated access: centralized and decentralized. Centralized is a single place where individuals access intake and assessment, while decentralized offers many sites for intake and assessment (NAEH, 2013). The key strategies of coordinated access include systems integrations and inter-organizational relationships. Coordinated Access creates a more efficient homeless serving system by helping people move through the systems faster by providing appropriate interventions, reducing new entries into homelessness through prevention and diversion resources, and improving quality data collection (Youth Out Loud, 2014).

Promising Practices

- Centralized data system such as HMIS (NAEH, 2013)
- Trained staff who are knowledgeable of services available throughout the system of care (NAEH, 2013)
- Immediate medical and mental health needs assessments to determine appropriate interventions and prevention, led by health systems (CCRC, 2002)
- Develop metrics for coordinated access to determine effectiveness of the system (NAEH, 2013)

Promising Responses

Alameda County Housing Resource Centres, Alameda County, California

People experiencing a housing crisis in Alameda County seek assistance from one of eight Housing Resource Centres (HRC) in the region to access intake. Staff at HRCs conduct in-depth assessments (individuals are given a score) and refer individuals to financial assistance and/or case management for prevention, rapid re-housing, and/or housing location services, as well as any other resources needed. Although the HRCs are spread throughout the region, they are highly coordinated with each other, use a common assessment tool, data collection methods, and each is co-located at sites with different services. Staff include program assistants, case managers, housing specialists, Center coordinators, and finance personnel. The data collected at each Housing Resource Center is used to improve targeting and service efforts over time (NAEH, 2012).

Homeward Trust Coordinated Access, Edmonton, Alberta

In the fall of 2010, Homeward Trust began development of a coordinated intake program intended to centralize access to funded services for the purpose of enhancing efficiency in access. As a result of the demand for resources within the community, coordinated intake receives a large volume of housing inquiries and requests for services from both individuals and community agencies. The core values of coordinated access are client centered service delivery, prioritizing and triaging service access, balance across service providers, timely decision-making on program access, and leveraging the strengths of service providers. The

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

primary purposes of coordinated access include providing information on the Housing First program, coordinating vacancies within funded services, and maximizing resources through focusing efforts on a community wide system based approach.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4

Coordinated research, data collection, information sharing and evaluation

Coordination of research, data collection, and information sharing is an effective tool for facilitating knowledge dissemination and incorporating best practices to improve program effectiveness and capacity building. Increasing research and data collection will enhance effective strategy development and mobilization. It also enables community partners to better understand the challenging issues faced by diverse youth populations, how to meaningfully engage with youth, and notably, best evidence provides the framework for targeted strategies (USICH, 2013).

Promising Practices

- Information and data management (data collection and sharing across system of care) (Gaetz, 2014)
- Basic research on the causes, experiences and solutions to youth homelessness (Gaetz, 2014)
- Program evaluation (Gaetz, 2014)
- Knowledge mobilization (Gaetz, 2014)

Promising Responses

Eva's Initiatives National Learning Community, Toronto, Ontario

Eva's Initiatives National Learning Community is an online national forum that promotes collaboration, expertise and knowledge exchange between organizations working towards ending homelessness. The Learning Community enables agencies to research best and promising practices and to stay current on national priorities. It is a significant step forward in terms of creating a system to share and access research in the area of youth homelessness.

M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region, Edmonton, Alberta

M.A.P.S. Alberta supports local area networks of human service providers within the region through community mapping and planning. Involved in many community based projects, M.A.P.S. has partnered on multiple youth specific projects, including Old Strathcona Mapping Committee and the LGBTQ Mapping Committee.

M.A.P.S. planning involves five phases of community mapping:

- Joint Commitment: members agree on a common purpose; boundaries are defined and agreement is reached on what the group wishes to accomplish together
- Creating Community Profile: information is gathered about the community; the information is

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mapped; and the maps are supplemented with narratives

- Community Engagement: others are invited to review the community profile created; as agreed, the profile is revised and/or enhanced; community needs, strengths, gaps and resources are identified; and an action plan is created
- Action: the action plan is implemented
- Reflection: successes and challenges in working together are identified and documented; successes and challenges in achieving expected outcomes are identified and documented; and the cycle starts again with a discussion regarding ongoing joint commitment to planning together

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STRATEGY TWO – PREVENTION & SUSTAINABILITY

Prevention means eliminating or reducing the risks of youth becoming homeless in the first place. Successful prevention approaches require an integrated and coordinated system amongst youth serving agencies, government, and organizations both internal and external to the homeless serving sector. Prevention also requires a focus on youth resiliency and engagement, mechanisms for family reunification, education and awareness, and adoption of a zero discharge into homelessness policy.

Homelessness prevention approaches draw from a public health model of prevention, which is generally understood within three categories: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (Culhane, Metraux, & Byrne, 2010). **Primary prevention** addresses community wide interventions that focus on working upstream by looking at the factors that increase the risk for homelessness. **Secondary prevention** identifies conditions at early stages for those at risk or newly homeless. Within this category lie **systems preventions** – stopping the flow of individuals from mental health care, corrections and child protection into homelessness, and **early intervention** – supporting individuals/families retain housing or rapid rehousing into safe and secure housing options. **Tertiary prevention** refers to ensuring individuals are moved into housing with wraparound supports (Gaetz, 2014).

RECOMMENDATION 2.1

Education on pathways into homelessness and mental health and addictions awareness

Focused research on the pathways into homelessness has revealed instrumental information around the causes and consequences of homelessness. When conceptualizing the pathways, it is important to note that there is an immense diversity of factors that contribute to a person leaving home and that homelessness is rarely experienced as a single event (Gaetz, 2014). Homelessness can be characterized as repeated exposure to traumatic circumstances, chronic stress and severe adversity. The linkages between trauma and mental health reflect the high percentages of homeless youth who struggle with poor mental health and addictions (Kidd, 2013). In regards to accessing services, research indicates that a majority of youth experiencing mental health issues are not receiving treatment, given the multiple barriers to accessing care and the stigmatization of mental health. Key barriers include unstable housing, lack of formal diagnosis, substance use, lack of identification and long waitlists (Kidd, 2013). In reference to addictions, research shows substance use is influenced by the complex intersections between background, situational, lifestyle and economic factors, and that many youth with addictions are not receiving appropriate supports and services (Gaetz, 2011). Notably, the leading causes of death amongst homeless youth are suicide and drug use (Belanger, 2014). There is a clear need for preventive programming that promotes mental health awareness, engages youth to speak about mental health, long term connections to mental health services, and importantly, the involvement of youth as active leaders in developing mental health awareness programs (Youth Out Loud, 2013).

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Promising Practices

- Education on the signs and symptoms of pathways into homelessness and increased attention to identifying major mental illness and effective strategies for assessing and managing short term risk (Youth Out Loud, 2013)
- Education about the pathways to accessing mental health services (Kidd, 2013)
- Enhancing service collaboration amongst partners through training youth workers in mental health assessments and intervention, and the creation of streamlined points to access mental healthcare in the community and hospital based services (Kidd, 2013)
- Adopting trauma informed care, which involves the provision of services within a framework that acknowledges the relevance of trauma and provides access to interventions that address trauma (Kidd, 2013)
- Seamless collaboration by mainstream providers, rather than recreating mental health systems within the sector (Gaetz, 2014)

Promising Responses

Boys and Girls Club of Canada's Flex Your Head! Program, Calgary, Alberta

Flex Your Head is a program that promotes mental health and wellbeing among youth and provides them with the necessary tools and strategies for preventing and managing distress. It discusses mental health in an inclusive, engaging and safe approach. Flex Your Head is informed by current theory and practices in youth mental health interventions. Programs are co-led by a Club staff member and a youth leader.

Light Up Your Mind School Program, Canadian Mental Health Association, Edmonton, Alberta

The Mental Health Education Program offers several presentations designed for Junior and Senior High School audiences. The “Light Up Your Mind” series consists of interactive presentations that incorporate videos, case studies, discussions, debates and games that provide information, increase understanding, and facilitate informed dialogue on mental health issues among youth. *When Brains Get Sick* presents youth with the signs and symptoms of common mental illnesses, myths and facts about mental illness, and statistics of mental illness in youth. It also provides tips on how to support a friend or family member, how to reach out for support, and available community resources. *Stamp Out Stigma* uses participatory activities and real-life videos to demonstrate how stigma affects youth with mental illness, and strategies for how to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. The overall objective of the presentation is for youth to learn to communicate about mental health issues more effectively, to develop strategies to reduce stigma, and to provide resources for youth who need to seek help.

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RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Youth engagement and resiliency strategies

Prevention efforts must work towards strengthening the protective and resiliency factors of youth, as these factors help mitigate risk and ultimately contribute to increased well-being and positive transitions to adulthood (Gaetz, 2014). Protective and resiliency factors include an individual's qualities and traits that help them persist under distress, traumatic or other challenging events (Gaetz, 2014). Meaningful youth engagement involves young individuals in planning, programming and service delivery, drawing upon the philosophy that respects the right for youth to be active participants in their own lives and acknowledges their capacity (Ministry of Child and Family Development, BC, 2013).

Promising Practices

Protective Factors

- Support higher levels of problem solving and decision making (Gaetz, 2014)
- Focus on positive self-esteem and feelings of self-worth (Gaetz, 2014)
- Focus on developing positive connections and relationship building with adult role models (Gaetz, 2014)
- Programming that establishes positive peer connections throughout the community (Gaetz, 2014)

Engagement

- Support and encourage a youth role in decision making processes (Gaetz, 2014)
- Engage youth through meaningful activities and programs, including the arts, sports and recreation (Gaetz, 2014)
- Provide opportunities for youth to contribute to community (Gaetz, 2014)
- Ensure spaces are youth centered, youth friendly, safe and accessible (Gaetz, 2014)
- Develop appropriate training for first point of contact staff and maintain supportive relationships with these workers (CCHRC, 2002)
- Provide diverse recreational activities, which are non-threatening and establish trusting youth-staff relationships (CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

HeartWood Centre, Youth Engagement Spectrum

The HeartWood Centre works with multiple organizations, communities and systems to identify and enhance opportunities for youth engagement. Engagement opportunities are situated along a spectrum, where forms of engagement generate different degrees of individual, organizational and community outcomes. The spectrum includes program or organizational assistance, informal influence, formal roles in policy-making and decision making, youth/adult partnerships and youth leadership.

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Compass, Youth Empowerment and Support Services, Edmonton, Alberta

The Compass program is designed to help youth who have experienced neglect, trauma, or abuse to build emotional resilience and coping skills needed to live healthy and successful lives. Youth growing up in difficult situations and environments are often lacking in positive emotional coping methods used to navigate daily interactions. Compass uses the Trust Based Relational Intervention model to provide a nurturing environment where youth can develop skills and strategies needed in building trust based relationships and coping strategies to self-regulate emotional responses to anxiety or stress. The Compass team includes: a Relationship Worker who focuses on personal development and coping strategies with youth; a Cultural Diversity Worker who connects youth to cultural and spiritual aspects of life; an Artist to introduce and provide creative outlets for the youth; and a Support Services Coordinator who helps to coordinate the mental health/addictions and health services for youth.

RECOMMENDATION 2.3

Education and awareness campaigns in schools

Education and awareness strategies ensure that youth, caregivers, educators, and wider public are aware of the services that exist and ways to access services and supports to divert crisis. Such initiatives involve service or systems partners engaging with youth, schools and community with clear messaging around the contexts of youth homelessness and available resources. Importantly, early education and awareness helps equip both youth and teachers, as well as community leaders, with the knowledge necessary to identify individuals who may require help (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002). Education is a critical early intervention tool that requires funding commitment and partnerships between mainstream systems and community serving agencies.

Promising Practices

- High-risk parents are more successfully engaged through incorporating a multi-level family centered prevention program within a school context (CCHRC, 2002)
- Focus prevention programs on parents, youth and teachers strengths (CCHRC, 2002)
- Incorporate performance training methods (videos, live modelling role playing) to actively engage youth (CCHRC, 2002)
- Ensure educational programming is sensitive to barriers of low socio economic families and is culturally sensitive (CCHRC, 2002)
- Integrate awareness programs with multiple agencies and partners from integrated care systems to ensure suitability for prevention (CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

Covenant House Toronto, Toronto, Ontario

An interactive awareness presentation for youth in schools to learn about homelessness, youth rights and

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options available for youth. Covenant House offers two programs for schools intended for youth in grades 6-12. *Before You Run* is an age-appropriate presentation that explains the diversity of contributing factors for youth homelessness: family breakdown, abuse, mental health, bullying, drugs and stress. The presentation includes a video featuring Covenant House youth relating their real-life experiences in a non-threatening way; *Reality Check* is an age-appropriate presentation that deglamourizes street life and discusses the struggles homeless youth face. Students participate in an activity that highlights the hardship of living independently, without family support, education or a career. Includes a video featuring Covenant House youth describing the challenges of living on the street and what they did to overcome them.

The Mustard Seed, Edmonton, Alberta

The Edmonton Mustard Seed delivers basic needs, housing and employment services to those living in poverty. Through the Mustard Seed's School Programming, teachers are invited to bring their class for a tour of the facility, or to host a guest from The Mustard Seed in their class to share and discuss issues of poverty, homelessness and vulnerable individuals. The Mustard Seed also offers a Social Issues Walk, a three-hour tour of Edmonton's inner city Boyle, McCauley and downtown neighbourhoods. The walk introduces the public to the realities of the inner-city and explores some of the reasons why people are poor, while presenting an overview of various inner city social services agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4

Promotion of family reunification and supports

Family reunification is an ideal situation and effective systems based approach to youth homelessness. Reconciliation involves a rethinking of assumptions around self-sufficiency to dispel the notion that self-sufficiency means independence from family (Gaetz, 2011). Rather self-sufficiency relies on establishing central relationships and receiving guidance throughout life's transitions. While many youth experience family conflict, particularly those engaged in high-risk behaviours, it is necessary to understand the complex and diverse compositions of families and recognize the potential for redeemable and supportive relationships with family members (Gaetz, 2014, Gaetz, et al., Kurtz et al., 2000). However, it is also necessary to recognize unsafe and destructive family dynamics; therefore, family reconnection must ultimately be guided by principles that support protection and safety of youth (Gaetz, 2014, CCRC, 2002). Importantly, the concept of family must also be inclusive and variable, based upon individual experiences and understandings.

Promising Practices

- Programs affiliated with local schools and community service agencies/outreach that offer information, referral systems for youth exhibiting behaviours problems (CCHRC, 2002)
- Culturally sensitive interventions through collaborative partnerships that are non-punitive, with steps towards concrete actions that are facilitated by trained staff (CCHRC, 2002, Gaetz, 2014)

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- Family based supported treatments, such as Brief Strategic Structural Family Therapy, Family Based Multi-systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Family Therapy (CCHRC, 2002; Alexander et al., 2000)
- Building developmental assets of youth and families (CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

Eva's Family Reconnect, Toronto, Ontario

Eva's Family Reconnect program works to assist young individuals aged 16-24 address and potentially reconcile differences with their families. The founding principle is that family is significant in everyone's lives, and that this is equally true for street entrenched youth. The program focuses on individual and family support for those in the shelter systems and those at risk of becoming homeless. Staff work with youth to address and resolve family conflict through counselling, referrals to other agencies, psychiatric assessments, psychological assessments for learning disabilities, and support workers that provide advocacy.

In Home Family Supports, Ben Calf Robe Society, Edmonton, Alberta

The Ben Calf Robe Society's In Home Family Support Program, Ketotayminawok ("All my Relations"), provides culturally sensitive, intervention and support services to Aboriginal families that have status with Region 6 Child & Family Services. The program provides contracted Family Intervention Support Services and Intense Family Stabilization and Preservation Services. Planned interventions and services are provided with the aim of strengthening and preserving youth, children and their families. Home based family centered services are designed to promote the protection and wellbeing of children in their homes, prevent unnecessary long term out-of-home placements, and respond immediately to the family at the point of crisis. Services aim to improve family interaction, help educate parents to improve their parenting abilities, enhance family support networks, and prevent, reduce or eliminate behaviours which may place a child, family, or community at risk.

RECOMMENDATION 2.5

Youth employment and education programming

The role of education, training and employment is a critical factor in addressing youth homelessness (Quilgars, Firzpatrick and Pleace, 2011). While programs within Canada tend to focus on skills development and labour readiness, prevention efforts must be comprehensive in nature, providing not only training but opportunities to complete school (Homeless Hub, 2013). In addition, all programming and services should embrace social inclusion practices, be accessible and take into consideration the barriers that thwart successful outcomes (Saewyc, Drozda, Rivers, MacKay and Peled, 2013).

Promising Practices

- Government funded employment and training strategies, delivered by community-based organizations

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- supporting gradual entry into the workforce (Youth Homelessness in Canada: Road to Solutions, 2013)
- Employment programs must be integrated into broader web of supports including safe housing, income, social and health supports (Saewyc et al., 2013)
- Engagement and partnerships with private and public sector employers who create employment and training opportunities for youth (Youth Homelessness in Canada: Road to Solutions, 2013)
- Social Inclusion Framework: program philosophy (supporting needs of youth, address socially exclusionary factors, exit from program with access to better jobs); structural supports (housing, income, health care); program components (real marketable skills, client driven case management, supporting special needs, mentoring and job shadowing, educational advancement); and institutional components (ongoing core funding, strategic partnerships, program evaluation, corporate engagement) (Saewyc et al., 2013)

Promising Responses

Eva's Phoenix, Toronto, Ontario

Eva's Phoenix is a transitional housing and training facility that supports 50 youth, aged 16-24, to participate in employment and pre-apprenticeships programs, for up to one year. The program partners with business, labour and community, providing homeless and street involved youth with life skills, career development and healthy transitions to independent living. Youth live in shared townhouse-style units with access to common areas. All participating youth must be involved in a training or employment program. Youth receive counselling, job placement assistance, housing support, mentorship opportunities and follow up support to ensure youth achieve and sustain self-sufficiency.

Foyer, Bredin Centre for Learning and Homeward Trust, Edmonton, Alberta

The Foyer project offers enhanced services to youth in the Housing First program who are staying at short-term supportive housing projects, notably NOVA. Foyer is operated by the Bredin Centre for Learning and is rooted in a holistic approach that connects each young person to the services he or she needs, with an emphasis on building resiliency and capacity for successful independent living, and to prevent a return to homelessness. This includes bridging to existing employment programs, skills enrichment or removing barriers to education and employment. The three key principles of a Foyer are: a focus on helping youth who are homeless or at risk of returning to homelessness to achieve independence; a holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs by offering integrated access to training, guidance, personal development and job search facilities; and a formal agreement between the Foyer and the young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to independence.

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RECOMMENDATION 2.6

Effective supports for youth aging out of government care

“Aging out” of the system refers to the situation when young individuals reach a certain age and are no longer entitled to a particular service or support, regardless of need or circumstance (Gaetz, 2014). Without strong connections to community and systems partners, many youth face difficult transitions from care that often result in negative outcomes, as many who leave care have underdeveloped life skills, inadequate education, lower wellbeing and insufficient supports to transition successfully to adulthood (Gaetz, 2014). Effective supports should be youth centered and work from an integrated systems approach that concentrates on establishing connections to systems and community providers for health, education, housing, employment and social wellbeing.

Promising Practices

- Ensure all transition plans are coordinated and integrated across the system of care, focusing on information sharing across the sector, and housing and supports (Gaetz, 2014)
- Provide youth with choices and involve them in the transition process to promote empowerment and self-sufficiency (Gaetz, 2014)
- Actively assist youth in finding affordable housing (Gaetz, 2014)
- Coordinate with education systems to facilitate student engagement and supports (Gaetz, 2014)
- Establish health, mental health and addictions supports to mainstream services (CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

Children Leaving Care Act, 2000, London, UK

The UK has implemented legislation and key reforms to child welfare in the attempt to stem the discharge of children and youth from care into homelessness. The Act ensures that local governments are directly responsible for youth between the ages of 16-18, who left care. Coordinated support includes: 1) income supplements, 2) assessment conducted when an individual reaches 16 to help with the transition process, and 3) planning with personal advisors who help youth develop a pathway plan up to the age of 21, which addresses housing, education, employment, financial and social support and youth centered care. The Act is supported by the **Homelessness Act** of 2002 and the **Children’s Act** of 2004, which prioritizes services and supports that help youth exit the child welfare system.

SOLO with Supports Transition Home, Chimo Youth Retreat Centre, Edmonton, Alberta

Chimo's SOLO with Supports Transition Home provides care and support 24 hours a day in a group living environment for youth and young adults who may need more intensive counselling, support, guidance and assistance than is currently available in existing programs. The youth in this program will often be transferring on to the adult support system (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped and/or Persons with Developmental Disabilities). The SOLO with Supports Transition Home provides counselling and support, as

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well as direction in decision making, and supervision and training in the areas of personal wellness, nutrition, goal planning, finance, problem solving, making healthy choices and self-awareness.

RECOMMENDATION 2.7

Zero discharge into homelessness

In communities across Canada, failures and gaps at the systems and community level has resulted in youth being discharged into homelessness. An effective system of care means that no young person is discharged from any facility, program, shelter or home into a situation of homelessness (Gaetz, 2011; 2013; 2014). As part of the system of care, discharge planning can help people reach goals of stable housing, recovery and improved wellbeing (Backer, Howard and Moran, 2007). Proper discharge planning across the system of care requires integrated planning, case management and information sharing. Ostensibly, discharge planning connects institutional and community services with individuals based upon their specific needs (Backer et al., 2007).

Promising Practices

- Client and family involvement with the planning coordinator or team that includes staff recommendations and a written discharge plan (Backer et al., 2007)
- Discharge planners have established partnerships with local community providers and housing workers (Backer et al., 2007)
- Options planned for provision and management of medication, food and clothing, transportation, mental health services, medical care, income and in home supports (Backer et al., 2007)
- Clear communication about the timing and delivery of services, ongoing case management and coordinated supports (Backer et al., 2007)

Promising Responses

The Youth Reintegration Project (Roofs for Youth), Calgary, Alberta

The Youth Reintegration Project is a collaboration between the Calgary John Howard Society, Woods Homes and the Calgary Young Offenders Centre to provide supports to youth (aged 15-18) pre and post sentencing with the aim to reduce their risk of reoffending. Care plans focus on successfully exiting the justice system, finding employment, housing or education opportunities and reengaging with their community. This program was created for youth who become dependent on the homeless serving systems after being released from CYOC. Youth are often referred to shelters after release, with no other supports in place, often resulting in a breach of probation or the youth reoffending and the cycle continues. This program aims to break this cycle by providing youth with the supports and access to safe housing, financial literacy, education placement, mental health assessment and treatment, crisis support, skill development and vocational support (Roof for Youth, 2014).

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Transition to Independence Planning, Edmonton Region Child and Family Services, Edmonton, Alberta

In an effort to enhance discharge planning of youth in care of Child and Family Services, Caseworkers are responsible for completing a Transition to Independence Plan for all youth on their caseloads when they turn 16 years of age. The Transition to Independence Plan is a support plan for youth used to identify immediate and future goals and to assist in developing a specific plan to prepare the youth for independence and adulthood. Should a Caseworker recommend placement into a Supported Independent Living (SIL) program, the Regional Placement Transition Specialist works to assist youth to transition into a SIL program, or offers other housing resources in the event that the youth does not meet the criteria for SIL. The Specialist conducts a consultation interview with the youth to gain a better understanding of where they are in terms of life skills, what their needs are, and what would be the best program for them. The consultation includes gathering information from the youth on their life skills and goals, culture and history, and relationships and supports. Through the consultation, a placement decision regarding the youth is made, and shared with the youth and the SIL agency to which the youth is referred.

RECOMMENDATION 2.8

Aboriginal cultural safety approaches

Homelessness is experienced by individuals with diverse backgrounds, values and beliefs. It is equally important to recognize that the cultural values of providers and delivery systems effect how services are delivered and accessed. Cultural safety is an approach that recognizes the impact of colonialism upon Aboriginal people and the resultant social conditions and continued marginalization of Aboriginal people as partners and decision makers in all stages of their care planning and delivery. As an approach it enables safe service to be defined by those who receive the service based upon cultural needs and values.

In any attempt to address homelessness with Aboriginal youth, there must be a comprehensive contextualization of the structural failures that have resulted in the over representation of Aboriginal homeless youth. Research shows a strong link “between the institutionalization of Aboriginal children and youth and the high rates of Aboriginal youth homelessness in some cities. Due to poverty and the lack of stable affordable housing options, many Aboriginal youth have been caught up in the cycles of care/custody/incarceration” (Raising the Roof, 2013). Effective responses for Aboriginal youth must include intensive culturally-appropriate supports at an early stage, coupled with safe housing. It is essential that Aboriginal communities are engaged and participate in the development of Aboriginal strategies and approaches.

Promising Practices

Individual Level

- Training and education of staff and providers on the historical and contemporary impacts of colonialism (including residential schools, sixties scoop, child welfare)

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- Develop multidimensional, culturally relevant assessments at intake (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)
- Flexible roles and boundaries (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)

Program Level

- Access must be decentralized, flexible hours, natural supports, peer mentors, linguistic competence, formal partnerships (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)
- Meaningful involvement of individuals and family (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)
- Holistic program encompassing spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical self (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)

Organizational Level

- Organizational and program cultural competence plans and assessments (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)
- Culturally diverse staffing and training (Parikh and Delphin, 2007)

Promising Responses

Ravens Lodge, Vancouver, British Columbia

Ravens Lodge, operated by Urban Native Youth Association is a safe environment for Aboriginal female youth aged 11-15, who are in care of Vancouver Children and Family Services Society (VACFSS). The goal is to empower youth to make positive lifestyle choices and create positive change in their lives by using culture as therapy, offering one to one support, cultural activities and ceremonies, life skills, health, family mediation and reunification (when appropriate), and making referrals to community resources. Youth are referred through VACFSS.

Nikanihew Future Leaders Program, Native Counselling Services of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

Nikanihew (“one who leads”) is a program committed to involving Aboriginal youth in cultural, health and wellness, leadership development, and recreation-oriented activities, with the intention to assist Aboriginal youth in becoming community leaders. Through combining cultural teachings, guidance from Aboriginal Elders, and water safety education and leadership skills, Nikanihew strengthens ties to heritage and teaches a respect for Mother Earth, specifically the element of water. The program activities include cultural celebrations, retreats and leadership workshops, and water safety and rescue education. Through Nikanihew, youth gain self-confidence and leadership skills, experience mentoring opportunities, as well as develop the ability to prevent and reduce drowning in the community. Youth in the Nikanihew program receive bus and facility passes to reduce barriers to participation.

Kokomish Group Home, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, Edmonton, Alberta

Kokomish (“grandmother” in the Ojibwa language) is a group care program offered by Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society that provides intermediate and long-term care to Aboriginal youth (12-17 years) who are in the

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care of Region 6 Child and Family Services. Using traditional Aboriginal perspectives and values, youth are provided with supervision, guidance and support. Youth staying in Kokomish house are introduced to or reconnected with their culture and traditions, while receiving counselling and support in the development of life skills including goal setting, budgeting, menu planning, meal preparation, health and safety, time management and planning successfully for their future. Youth are also given the space to grow and learn life lessons through community programs such as schools, sports teams, employment, hobbies/clubs, cultural groups, and recreation. Kokomish collaborates with partners in justice, education, and Children Services to ensure youth receive the support and guidance needed to move them towards independence.

RECOMMENDATION 2.9

Cultural competence & connections for immigrants & newcomers

Across Canada many immigrants and newcomers are facing increased poverty and barriers to the labour market, which is impacting their economic and social integration (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010). In relation to homelessness, studies indicate that among newcomers homelessness is almost entirely hidden, given that individuals are accessing informal networks to address housing and support needs (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010). While informal networks are able to provide newcomers with short term financial and housing services, such networks for the most part lack established partnerships with mainstream services, potentially inhibiting integration and access to resources (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010). Studies also indicate that mainstream services are not always accessible to immigrants and newcomers due to inadequate staff training around cultural competency and settlement services, language barriers, and lack of effective coordination between the homelessness sector and settlement services (Access Alliance, 2003). Effective approaches require coordination and integration of homelessness and settlement services, delivery of culturally appropriate services, and training on the realities and issues affecting immigrant populations (Access Alliance, 2003).

Promising Practices

- Enhance support workers assessment and understanding of the impacts and hidden factors of migration (Gajardo, 2010)
- Employ cultural competency approaches that incorporate a broader view of an individual's specific needs framed by an understanding of the clients cultural background (Gajardo, 2010)
- Support workers are cognizant of their own social positioning and assumptions (Gajardo, 2010)
- Enhance relationships and connections between settlement services to housing and the homelessness sector (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)
- Increase translation/interpretation services (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)
- Develop staff capacity to provide settlement and immigration relation information and to make appropriate referrals (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)

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- Develop staff capacity to identify mental health issues among new comers (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)
- Enhance outreach services/programming that engages informal networks and settlement organizations (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)
- Intensive case management and follow up when youth first arrive to Canada (Learning Enrichment Foundation, 2010)

Promising Responses

Newcomer Children and Youth Program, Catholic Social Services, Edmonton, Alberta

The Newcomer Children and Youth Program provides settlement and integration support services to immigrant and refugee children and youth, as well as their parents. Newcomer children and youth up to the age of 24 receive assistance in adapting to life in Canada, including: orientation to Canadian life and society; help in accessing financial, educational, housing, social, and community services; information and referrals to community programs and services; homework and academic support; direction to online resources (i.e. government resources, support groups); in-school settlement services; supportive counselling and guidance; and sessions on career and life management during and after high school. The program is specifically designed to address the settlement and integration needs of newcomer children and youth.

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STRATEGY THREE – HOUSING & SUPPORTS

Central to any effective strategy to end youth homelessness is getting young persons into housing and providing them with the supports needed to maintain safe and stable housing and healthy transitions to independence. As with the diversity and uniqueness of youth responses, housing solutions must include a range of options across a continuum that matches youth needs with suitable and affordable options. Regardless of the model, youth need the flexibility to move across the continuum of housing options according to their current needs. Successful housing also necessitates available and appropriate supports that focus on the development of life skills, meaningful engagement, access to education and employment, and strengthening social relations. A key factor to increasing future independence is ensuring that housing and support options are youth centered, involving youth throughout all stages of planning.

Importantly, housing and support services assist youth in navigating the complex and challenging realities of the private rental market, where many youth face difficulties with landlords around unemployment and bad or zero credit, history with the criminal justice system, mental health and addictions issues, racism, homophobia, and family housing. Integrated housing and supports also coordinate responses for youth who require extensive supports and congregate supportive housing. For some youth, independent living may be isolating and lonely.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1

Re-envisioning emergency services

The orientation of emergency services has predominantly focused on providing people with services and supports that meet immediate needs. While emergency services play a central role in the homeless serving sector, paradigm shifts in the response to homelessness call for a reorientation of emergency responses “to support prevention based models of early intervention and strategies to help move young people into housing, with appropriate supports” (Gaetz, 2014, p. 62).

Promising Practices

- Case management should occur when youth are in emergency services, with the goal of family reunification (if safe and redeemable) or transition to independent living (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Focus on life skills development, educational opportunities, community engagement and participation (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Short stay in shelters with focus on transitioning to stable housing options and working from Housing First approach (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Safe respite or “cooling off” accommodation (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- A strong outreach focus to bring in young people who are not connected to services. (Gaetz, 2014;

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CCHRC, 2002)

- Investing in shelters that provide individual rooms with locked doors (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Adopt a client centered case management approach for individuals and families that enter the system and ensure they are tracked as they navigate their way out of the system (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Fund and reward service providers for focusing on prevention and rapid rehousing as a service priority and make the goal of emergency services a shorter experience of homelessness (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

Alone in London, London, UK

Alone in London is a ‘time out’ accommodation service that services youth aged 16-17 years of age. Youth are provided with temporary accommodation (up to six weeks) where they work with family mediators who offer 24 hour support. Initial mediation focuses on one to one support and moves towards joint sessions with family members. The goal of the program is to support youth to return home or into independent living. Follow up support is provided to continue healthy relationship dynamics.

SHIFT Program, Hope Mission, Edmonton, Alberta

Hope Mission’s SHIFT Program aims to take youth where they are at, offering a safe and non-judgmental environment for male youth (16-24 years) who are ready to move towards independence. The program provides single occupancy rooms for up to 12 individuals, with common areas such as the kitchen, recreation room and laundry facilities. SHIFT provides the opportunity for youth to stabilize in a safe environment, including non-medical detoxification, and support and guidance in developing individual action plans and life skills training. Courses are offered on topics such as addictions, anger management, positive stress relief, boundary setting, personal health and wellness, identifying emotions, and personal identity, as well as spiritual exploration through Bible study and church involvement. Clients also receive referrals for other services, such as medical services, addiction counselling, supported living programs, employment skills and educational upgrading.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2

Increase the amount of housing options available

When considering housing responses for youth, no single option will meet the needs of all youth, but rather a spectrum or continuum of options must be available to effectively meet individual needs and preferences (Gaetz, 2014). Within this housing continuum, youth must be allowed to transition across housing programs as they develop life skills and financial stability (Gaetz, 2014). Importantly, the trajectory of transition must remain flexible, allowing youth to re-enter housing programs and move back along the continuum depending upon their current situation (Gaetz, 2014). Housing can take multiple forms, including transitional housing,

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which is a controversial term given the adoption of Housing First philosophy. However, transitional housing has been identified as a model of accommodation within the Housing First Youth Framework, with the caveat that the aim of transitional housing must be to eventually support youth to transition into independence or permanent supportive housing (Gaetz, 2014).

Promising Practices

- Family Reconnect: best supported through ongoing counseling and supports, however, while family reunification is ideal, this may not be a safe or possible choice for some youth (Gaetz, 2014)
- Permanent Supportive Housing: successful for youth with complex needs, as this model is a more integrated model of long term housing and supports (Gaetz, 2014)
- Transitional Housing: key features include flexible time limits, youth appropriate supports, concentration on education, employment opportunities, youth centered case management and positive youth development approach. The two stage model involves youth living in congregate settings (shared living space and cooking) for the first stage, then transitioning into the second stage of increased independence with separate bachelor apartments within the same facility, allowing for greater structure than scattered site models (Gaetz, 2014)
- Independent Living: youth obtain and maintain individual or shared permanent housing in the private market or social housing sector, with appropriate supports (Gaetz, 2014)

Promising Responses

Phoenix Youth Programs, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Phoenix Youth Programs include: Phoenix House, a long-term facility for homeless youth; Supervised Apartment Program, an independent living option; Follow-Up Program, support services for youth after leaving the residential programs; and Phoenix Centre for Youth, a drop-in facility offering day services and advocacy for youth in need. Phoenix Youth Programs believes that focusing on youth empowerment and engagement, access to resources, and valuing the dignity and potential of every human will lead to self-realization and self-worth, ostensibly leading to improved social wellbeing.

Supported Independent Living and Group Care Programs, McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association, Edmonton, Alberta

McMan's Supported Independent Living (SIL) program is a community-based housing and support program for youth aged 15-22. Youth in the program are assisted in acquiring the skills and experience needed to make a successful transition to independence and adulthood. The SIL Program offers three types of accommodation with varying levels of support: individual accommodation in which the youth lives in his/her own apartment in the community; semi-independent living in which the youth lives in his/her own apartment within a staffed building; and transitional independent living within a staffed house in the community. McMan also offers group care services for youth tailored to the current circumstances, distinct needs, abilities and potential of

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each individual. The group care program places a strong emphasis on family support so that youth stay connected to their families. Family visits and involvement in group care activities are encouraged and supported whenever possible.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3

Availability of affordable housing

While ending homelessness involves more than housing, the stark reality is that homelessness cannot be solved unless there is an adequate supply of affordable and stable housing (Gaetz, 2011; Gaetz, 2013; Gaetz, 2014). Research indicates that coordinated efforts will inevitably result in a bottle neck throughout the system of care, if there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing options (Gaetz, 2011). Affordable housing can be defined as “housing that costs an individual or family less than 30% of their annual income, with people paying more defined as being in ‘core housing need’” (Gaetz, 2011, p. 23).

Promising Practices

- Strong commitment and focused collaborative action on the parts of governments, housing providers, management bodies, community organizations, private and public sector (Homeward Trust, 2011)
- Develop more robust housing indicators at national and community levels to measure housing insecurities (Gaetz, 2011)
- Establish direct grants as incentives for private capital (Gaetz, 2011)
- Create innovating financing options (Gaetz, 2011)
- Establish a social housing investment fund (Gaetz, 2011)
- Partner with community housing providers (Gaetz, 2011)
- Develop and implement appropriate regulator tools at provincial and municipal levels (Gaetz, 2011)

Promising Responses

The Way Ahead, Edmonton, Alberta

The City of Edmonton’s strategic plan for 2009-18, titled *The Way Ahead*, provides the City’s vision for 2040 and establishes six 10-year strategic goals. *The Way Ahead* outlines outcomes for each strategic goal and provides measures and targets for each outcome. These targets are set at 3-year and 10-year increments. An annual review and update is conducted by City Council, as well as an extensive review and update every four years, in order to better reflect changes in the City’s current circumstances and operating environment. A priority for the first three years of this strategy was to “increase the supply and range of affordable housing to meet citizens’ needs.”

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Cornerstones: Edmonton’s Plan for Affordable Housing, Edmonton, Alberta

Cornerstones (2006-2012) is the City of Edmonton’s 5-year plan for Affordable Housing, aiming to increase the number of affordable housing units and to advocate for increases in funding and income supports and services for lower income Edmontonians. A second phase, Cornerstones II (2012-16), is currently underway and includes another five-year secondary suite grant program, as well as the new Housing Opportunities Program for Edmonton (HOPE) and the Curb Appeal Program. The Cornerstones initiative is especially noteworthy in that it establishes an active role for the municipality in the development of affordable housing units.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4

Housing First for youth

The success of Housing First is well established nationally and has directed the housing response in Edmonton since 2009. As an approach it has proven effective in providing permanent housing for individuals and families, particularly for ‘hard to house’ persons including the chronically homeless and those with complex mental health and addictions challenges (Gaetz, 2014). The success of Housing First works upon the premise that everyone has the right to safe, secure and stable housing without any preconditions of readiness, and is supported through a range of supports based upon the needs of the individual. While Housing First is successful for adults, can it work for youth? Drawing upon the Housing First Youth Framework (Gaetz, 2014), Housing First can be an effective intervention for youth through appropriate adaptations and tailored supports to meet the needs of youth. Importantly, different models of accommodation are required, including transitional housing options. The focus of supports must be youth oriented, building on life skills development, meaningful engagement, access to education and employment, and strengthening social relations.

Promising Practices

Guiding principles for a Youth Housing First framework include (Gaetz, 2014):

- Immediate access to housing with no preconditions
- Youth choice and self determination
- Positive Youth Development Orientation
- Individualized and Client Driven Supports
- Social and Community Integration

Application of Housing First (Gaetz, 2014):

- Guiding philosophy
- Integrated systems approach
- Program models
- Team interventions – case management

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Models of Accommodation (Gaetz, 2014):

- Family Reconnect
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Transitional Housing (Stage 1: Congregate; Stage 2: Separate Units)
- Independent Living (Scattered Site)

Promising Responses

Infinity Project, Boys and Girls Club of Calgary

The Infinity Project serves youth aged 16-24, helping them obtain permanent housing and providing supports to successfully transition to adulthood. Social supports include facilitating family reunification where appropriate and safe, referrals in accessing services and supports, re-engagement with education and training and youth engagement and empowerment. Youth engagement has resulted in higher levels of community connectedness and involvement in community programming and initiatives. Guided by a Housing First philosophy, the Infinity Project has adopted a zero discharge into homelessness policy.

NOVA, Edmonton John Howard Society, Edmonton, Alberta

NOVA offers homeless young people (16-24 years) who may have been street involved or struggling with drugs, alcohol, isolation and/or mental health issues with a safe place to live in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Each young person has chosen to live at NOVA and is supported to break that cycle, receiving support and assistance in developing the skills necessary to make positive lifestyle choices and live independently in the community. This includes encouragement and assistance in engaging in educational upgrading, a personal development program or to find employment. NOVA consists of two program models, STAY (Successfully Transitioning All Youth) and REST (Respect, Equality, Self-Care, Tools), located at the same site in order to provide appropriate approaches and supports to residents depending on where they are in their process of transition.

RECOMMENDATION 3.5

Integrated support service and case management

An effective tool to ending youth homelessness is the combination of case management and housing support which is provided throughout a young person's transition to adulthood, and for some, independent living (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011). Within integrated systems approaches, youth are clients of the entire sector, rather than specific agencies, enabling for shared responsibilities and sustainable long term support (Gaetz, 2011; Gaetz, 2014). An essential feature of case management is determining what kinds of supports an individual needs and then matching those needs to appropriate supports. Team based approaches are generally applied for supports and case management of chronically homeless and complex needs individuals. Leading models include Assertive Community Treatment, which involves a multidisciplinary team comprised of

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psychiatrists, physicians, social workers, nurses, peer support workers etc. who operate within the community where the individual resides (Gaetz, 2014). It also includes Intensive Case Management, which centres on a single case manager who works to promote independence and quality of life through the coordination of appropriate services and provision of ongoing support.

Promising Practices

- Frequent service contact (CCHRC, 2002)
- Thorough knowledge and skill base to work with complex needs youth (CCHRC, 2002)
- Guided by core service principles, such as small caseloads (CCHRC, 2002)
- Organizational practices empower case managers and give them authority to access needed client resources (CCHRC, 2002)
- Intake and coordinated access and assessment (Gaetz, 2011)

Promising Responses

Dandenong Centre, Victoria, Australia

The Dandenong Centre is a hub facility that co-locates 18 youth specific agencies to provide integrated and holistic services for youth aged 12-25 and their families. The Hub includes a kitchen, laundry and shower facilities. Specific supports include health and mental health and addictions services, education programs (arts, vocational, academic), employment and enterprise schemes, housing services, legal services, family mediation, parents programs, food bank, Aboriginal and migrant specific supports, sporting and recreational activities and connections to other community organizations.

NOVA CTI and Homeward Trust, Edmonton, Alberta

The NOVA project provides short-term housing and support to youth based on the “Critical Time Intervention” model that is focused on strengthening and rebuilding long-term connections to mainstream services (mental health, justice, and child and family services). Youth living at NOVA receive intensive time-limited support that is provided by a Youth Worker in close coordination with case managers.

RECOMMENDATION 3.6

Develop and maintain relationship-based approaches to supporting youth

Without consistent positive adult relationships, youth experience cycles of engagement and disengagement, compounded by alienation and isolation, which limits the ability to successfully secure and maintain connections with housing and support services. Relationship-based approaches are effective measures to mitigate disengagement. Effective practice focuses on building upon youth’s strengths and helping youth develop identities outside of their street based identity, enabling youth to experience positive transitions throughout their stages of adolescence towards adulthood (CPRN, 2009). Increased practices that connect

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youth with the wider community is a critical step in stably housing youth and enables youth to expand their support networks beyond case workers and agency staff (CPRN, 2009).

Promising Practices

- Flexible youth centered approaches that remain consistent through the cycles of engagement and disengagement (CPRN, 2009)
- Strengths and assets development (CPRN, 2009)
- Facilitating connections between youth and wider community (CPRN, 2009)
- Specialized service interventions for youth subpopulations (CPRN, 2009)

Promising Responses

Inner City Mental Health Program, Vancouver, British Columbia

The Inner City Mental Health Program is as an example of a relationship-based outreach service that provides clinical psychiatric services to street entrenched youth at two shelter locations in Vancouver. It is a partnership between St. Paul's Hospital, Covenant House Vancouver, Watari, and Vancouver Coastal Health. Diverting from traditional models, this program meets youth in safe spaces versus hospital or institutional settings. Outcomes have shown an increase in shelter stay, correlated with long-term tenure and effective interventions with severe mental health and addictions issues (Mataias, 2009).

High-risk Youth Unit, Edmonton Region 6 Child and Family Services, Edmonton, Alberta

In 2005, the High-risk Youth Unit began operations in response to the concern over how youth services were being delivered. The Unit is based upon the premise that high-risk youth do want connections with adults, but that the way in which services have traditionally been provided has not fostered positive relationships between caseworkers and youth, thereby resulting in many youth feeling discontent and disconnected from “the system” as a whole. The Unit focuses on building one to one relationships with youth; case workers have lower caseloads in order to increase the amount of face to face contact, as well as youth workers to help engage young people with the community and other service providing agencies. Harm reduction and strength-based/resiliency approaches are used to engage youth in making decisions about their own lives. The focus is on building positive relationships with the youth, on developing safety plans, and on maintaining open lines of communication.

RECOMMENDATION 3.7

Maintain outreach services to connect youth with supports and housing

Outreach is the initial and most critical step in connecting youth to mainstream services, providing linkages to community resources, caring for immediate needs and developing stable trusting relationships (CCHRC, 2002). Many of the youth whom outreach works with are youth who are isolated, have difficulty trusting systems and

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adults, have multiple barriers and minimal access to resources (CCHRC, 2002; Sullivan-Mintz, 1995). Importantly, outreach fosters meaningful engagement with youth, and identifies subcultures and characteristics of the street communities, which is critical information that helps to inform service and program design (Gleghorn et al., 2000). Outreach strategies require the development of youth's individual circumstances and needs, and a reduction in the social and cultural barriers that can impede youth from accessing mainstream services (Gaetz, 2014). The ultimate goal of outreach is to help people move off the streets, a goal which requires staff to be knowledgeable on the range of services and supports available at the systems and community level (Gaetz, 2014).

Promising Practices

- Provide recreational activities as recruitment and engagement strategy (CCHRC, 2002)
- Provision of client centered services (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Flexible programming and services, meeting youth where they are at (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Provision of short term and long term follow up based upon care plan (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Basic triage assessment to identify and respond to potential life threatening problems (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)
- Comprehensive assessment identifying range of needs and supports (Gaetz, 2014; CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

StreetWorks Collaborative, Minneapolis, Minnesota

StreetWorks is a collaboration between several community-based organizations that provide street based outreach to homeless youth. The focus of StreetWorks is based upon a rapid rehousing program, which aims to establish relationships, provide basic needs and offer a financial assistance program that provides youth with one-time grants to pay first and last month's rent and security deposit. Outreach workers assess and screen youth participants for the ability to pay market rate rent with wages or benefits after receipt of financial assistance.

Relentless Youth Outreach Project, YOUCAN, Edmonton, Alberta

YOUCAN Youth Services' Relentless Youth Outreach Workers reach out to youth and empower them to make positive and healthy life decisions. The Outreach program is based on transformational and long term relationship building with youth, with the overall aim of transitioning youth to safe and self-sufficient living. The Outreach Workers travel to community hot spots where youth engaged in high risk behaviours gather and work to reduce incidents of disruption and crime, increase attendance of youth in school, pre-employment or employment programs, and work to address the school, family, peer group, community, individual and societal-related factors that affect youth engaged in high risk behaviours. The program uses a proactive and intensive approach to connecting and building relationships with youth, and actively works with strategic partners and other youth serving agencies to engage with youth engaged in high risk behaviours.

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RECOMMENDATION 3.8

Appropriate and adequate services and supports for youth in high-risk situations

The unique needs and conditions of youth engaged in high-risk behaviours are more successfully met with strategies that are rooted in a harm reduction approach. While a controversial topic at community and systems levels, harm reduction is considered a realistic approach to addressing the negative consequences of substance use (Gaetz, 2014). The fundamental goal of harm reduction is to educate youth to be more conscious of the risks of their behaviour and to provide them with tools and resources to reduce their risk (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009). Key principles include: humanistic approach; risks are placed upon a continuum across an individual's life; behavioural change; adaptive interventions; and strengths based (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009). Research has amassed considerable evidence of the effectiveness of harm reduction and there is growing acceptance of harm reduction as a tool for working with youth struggling with addictions (Gaetz, 2014).

Promising Practices

- Targeted prevention and case management (CCHRC, 2002)
- Valuing Youth (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Consistent availability (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Self-awareness (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Long term involvement (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Positive relationship building (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Intentional interactions (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Celebrate small successes (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009)
- Build community networks and relationships (Smyth and Eaton-Erikson, 2009).

Promising Responses

Shout Clinic, Toronto, Ontario

Shout clinic is a community health centre in Toronto that provides comprehensive services to homeless youth, particularly youth underserved by the sector. The clinic works from a harm reduction philosophy and partners with other community-based agencies throughout Toronto to coordinate comprehensive supports. The clinic offers onsite and mobile harm reduction distribution programs, access to safer drug use equipment and safer sex supplies, safe injection sites, overdose prevention, methadone programs and outreach that incorporates health promotion, counselling and education and referral to housing and supports.

REE*START Youth Program, Edmonton John Howard Society, Edmonton, Alberta

The REE*START Youth Program for at risk youth aims to support and empower youth to make healthy choices in life through promoting independence and helping youth to develop positive support systems. REE*START, which stands for Resources, Education, Employment, Support, Teaching, Advocacy, Respect, Transition, is open

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to all youth (age 15-22), including youth with or without Criminal Justice status, and with or without involvement in Alberta Children's Service. Participants in the program are self-referred on a voluntary basis; therefore, they must want to change their criminal behaviours and must be willing to commit to the program. The program involves Youth Transition Advisors, who provide short and long term support on a one-to-one basis, including employment preparation, support and advocacy, identification and training, goal setting, and referrals to other services.

RECOMMENDATION 3.9

Enhance services/supports for diversity and subpopulations

Given the diversity of the homeless youth population and the overrepresentation of certain subpopulations it is essential that the system of care institute and practice anti-discrimination policies to ensure that any further marginalization is stemmed. While subpopulations are unique, there is often overlap and intersections amongst the challenges, causes and social conditions experienced by youth. Effective supports require comprehensive approaches that address systemic and root issues, and work towards social wellbeing and safe transitions.

General Promising Practices

- Develop strong collaborations with service providers, conduct assessments, implement case management and long term care (CCHRC, 2002)
- Develop integrated and comprehensive supports that are youth centered and relationship-based, focusing on safe and stable housing, counselling programs, health services, financial and educational opportunities (CCHRC, 2002)
- Incorporate zero tolerance policies and anti-discrimination frameworks into mandates to safeguard against violence, emotional maltreatment and direct or inadvertent mistreatment of youth (CCHRC, 2002)
- Peer mentoring and positive role modeling (Gaetz, 2011)

LGBTQ

Significant increases in LGBTQ youth homelessness is a pressing concern for communities, particularly given that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population (Abramovich, 2012). While there are many factors related to LGBTQ youth homelessness, research shows that key reasons for leaving or being forced from the family home include experiences of homophobia and transphobia, which in many cases continues for youth in the shelter system (Abramovich, 2012; Homeless Hub, 2014). Despite the extensive research and specialized support services for youth, there are few specialized support options, shelters and housing initiatives across Canada that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth. To address the needs of LGBTQ youth, recommendations for support services include focusing on implementing anti-discrimination policies, staff

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training on LGBTQ culture and language, peer mentoring and collaborative partnerships with LGBTQ agencies.

Promising Practices

- Adopt formal non-discrimination and anti-homophobia/anti-transphobia policies and training for staff, including understanding LGBTQ culture and terminology (Abramovich, 2012)
- Increase safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth (Abramovich, 2012)
- Service providers adopt a harm reduction approach (Abramovich, 2012)
- Service providers appropriately address LGBTQ identity during intake process (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009)
- Support access to education, medical care and mental health care (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009)
- Support transgender and gender nonconforming youth participants (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009)
- Inform LGBTQ youth about local LGBTQ programs and services (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009)
- Develop agency connections to LGBTQ organizations (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009)

Promising Responses

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, Toronto, Ontario

Egale is a Canadian charity that promotes LGBT human rights through research, education and community engagement. Egale supports many initiatives across Canada and has developed the Egale Youth Outreach Centre, which is a youth housing support and crisis intervention centre for LGBTQ2S youth aged 16 and older in the Greater Toronto area. In conjunction with the Egale Youth Outreach Centre, Egale is in the development stage for a four-tiered housing model designed for LGBTQ2S youth who have been experiencing persistent homelessness. The philosophies underpinning this approach are *housing first* and the *foyer model*. The goal is to provide youth with as many options as possible so they can make a housing choice that best supports their needs and level of acuity. The model recognizes that adolescence is a time when youth are still emotionally, psychologically and physically developing, and that the needs of LGBTQ2S-identified youth are unique in comparison to their non-LGBTQ2S peers. The model, at its core, moves to support youth in a client-centered manner, in creating goals, working on trauma, and reducing isolation through the provision of emergency and longer term housing support.

The housing model proposed by Egale is built on four pillars:

1. Egale Youth Outreach Centre
2. Care Home
3. Interim Housing
4. Transitional Housing

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Pride Centre - Youth Space, Edmonton, Alberta

The Edmonton Pride Centre operates Youth Space, which provides support for LGBTQ youth between the ages of 12-24 and their families. Specific youth programming includes: *Trans Youth Talking*, a support and networking group for transgender and questioning youth; *EEEE* is a free recreational program that offers dodgeball, floor hockey, workshops, running, and general motivation; *JamOut* is a free music mentorship and instruction program; *Open Mic/Spoken Work*; and a *Youth Advisory Committee*.

GANG INVOLVED

Cities experiencing rapid urbanization and growth face many complex problems associated with urban realities. Youth gang involvement is one such urban issue. Although the relationship between homeless youth and gangs is not clearly correlated, research indicates that while gang behaviour is typically outside of the norm for homeless youth, the probability of gang affiliation increases the longer a youth remains street-entrenched and homeless. According to youth, gang involvement can increase chances of survival, enhance social networking, and offer peer support (Washington, 2011; Public Interest, 2009). Given that gang-involved youth are generally less engaged with mainstream services, support services should adopt more tailored approaches, including mentorship and peer support, outreach services, and linkages to systems partners (Region of Waterloo, 2010).

Promising Practices

- Develop street outreach programs that focus on:
 - Linking youth to services and pro-social activities and engages in activities with youth to learn methods to disrupt violence (Decker, Bynum, McDevitt & Varano, 2008)
 - Establish credibility with youth and follow through on commitments made to youth (Decker et al., 2008)
 - Establish credibility with law enforcement and partnering agencies (Decker et al., 2008)

- Develop and support youth mentoring programs:
 - Establish clear goals and procedures (Butera, 2014)
 - Develop recruitment strategies and screening procedures for prospective youth and mentors (Butera, 2014)
 - Match mentor and youth based on shared criteria (Butera, 2014)
 - Develop initial and ongoing training for mentors and youth – focus on realistic goal setting and expectations around the mentoring relationship (Butera, 2014)
 - Provide continuous support and supervision (Butera, 2014)
 - Encourage long term consistency and commitment of the mentor to encourage trust and positive relationship building/modelling (Butera, 2014)

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Promising Responses

Street Youth Legal Services, Justice for Children and Youth, Toronto, Ontario

Street Youth Legal Services is a program that offers legal advice, representation, referrals and education to street-involved youth between the ages of 16-24. This program is delivered to youth at drop-ins and shelters throughout the downtown core of Toronto. Additionally, the program engages in community development, research and policy reform activities.

Pohna: Keepers of the Fire, Native Counselling Services of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

The Pohna: Keepers of the Fire program, operated in partnership by Native Counselling Services of Alberta and the Edmonton Police Service, engages youth (aged 11 to 17) involved in criminal and gang related activity. Youth referred to NCSA by the police or other service providers are provided with opportunities and alternatives to help steer them away from involvement in gangs. This may involve working with schools to increase attendance and connection to school, connecting to aboriginal culture and teachings, or involvement in recreation and the arts. Pohna is a youth-driven program based on research that shows the best way to engage youth is to empower them to create change and to surround them with supportive adults. Based upon the direction and involvement of the youth, a Circle of Support is created to help implement case plans. Drawing on traditional knowledge from elders, Pohna aims to ensure youth are valued and given responsibilities to contribute to their community. Key partners include: Edmonton Public and Catholic Schools, Edmonton Young Offenders Centre, Alberta Children and Youth Services, Crown Councils Office, Youth Legal Defense Office, City of Edmonton, and the Community Solution to Gang Violence.

PREGNANT & PARENTING YOUTH

On average young women enter street life at an earlier age than men, greatly increasing the risk of sexual and physical victimization, which can lead to young girls seeking sex for safety and economic survival (Little, Gorman, Dzendoletas, Moravac, 2007). Research shows that most young pregnancies are unplanned and related to multiple factors, some including: limited life choices; desire for unconditional love; a means to access resources and housing; and unresolved grief from childhood trauma and interactions with child welfare agencies (Little et al., 2007). In concert with the multiple realities and conditions of youth homelessness, there are many barriers for pregnant homeless youth: few clinics dedicated to homeless populations; youth feel out of place in mainstream health settings and are untrusting of care providers; lack of identification; limited transportation options; fear that staff will contact child and family services (Little et al., 2007). To meet the multifaceted needs of pregnant and parenting youth, recommendations include increasing integrated service delivery, educational programs, client centered care plans, and developing strong partnerships and relationships at the community level between clinicians and youth.

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Promising Practices

- Developing trust requires workers to be committed, tenacious, flexible, and advocates (Little et al., 2007)
- Solutions must be multifaceted and client centered (Little et al., 2007)
- The provision of incentives especially food is very important, as food provided from shelters and drop in is not always adequate to satisfy the nutritional needs of pregnant women (Little et al., 2007)
- Ensure ongoing support for youth to reduce stressful situations and model positive coping behaviors (Little et al., 2007)
- Develop client centered care plans, including long term follow up supports (Little et al., 2007)

Promising Responses

Young Parents No Fixed Address (YPNFA), Toronto, Ontario

The YPNFA is a network of agencies and organizations dedicated to building strong community partnerships and innovative solutions to address the issues of young street involved/homeless pregnant and parenting youth and their children. The YPNFA is in the process of exploring responses to the mental health and sexual health needs of young parents.

Terra Centre, Edmonton, Alberta

The Terra Centre serves pregnant and parenting teens through a focus on three key areas: Family Outreach including Individual Support and Services for Dads, Housing Support Services, and Educational Support Services. The Family Outreach program offers short term and long term (up to five years) support to pregnant and parenting teen moms, as well as expectant and parenting young dads. Services include: pre and post-natal education and support, relationship and social support, parenting education, assistance in securing financial support, assistance securing childcare, clothes closet (free gently used children's clothing and accessories), and referrals to other community agencies and health centres. The Educational Support Services program involves a partnership with the Edmonton Public School Board to support teen mothers to finish their education. Pregnant and parenting teen mothers (up to age 19) attend Braemar School to complete junior and senior high school. Teen mothers can receive high quality childcare onsite through the Child and Family Support Centre (CFSC), thereby providing the peace of mind to focus on completing their education. Terra also offers a range of on-site support services at Braemar School to support youth to reach their academic and personal goals. Services include: emotional and supportive listening, pregnancy and parenting support, financial literacy and income tax support, a youth leadership program, and on-site childcare (specializing in infant care).

SEXUALLY EXPLOITED

The sexual exploitation of youth can occur to youth of any social and economic background. Many youth who are sexually exploited have experienced some form of physical, mental and sexual abuse and are often homeless and engaged in survival sex (Government of Alberta, Human Services, 2009). Understanding why

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youth get involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution is a complex matter, however there appear to be key predisposing factors: maltreatment at home; parental conflict and/or disruptive homes (addictions, mental health, domestic violence); racism; low self-esteem and self-worth, involvement in criminal activities, and addictions (GOA, Human Services, 2009).

Promising Practices

- Develop collaborations with other service providers in order to enhance coordination and delivery of services (CCHRC, 2002)
- Use of safe houses that provide sanctuary, counselling programs, primary and mental health/addictions and trauma services (CCHRC, 2002)
- Offering interventions that address systemic and root causes (CCHRC, 2002)
- Increase funding for street based outreach workers to establish trusting networks and initial linkages to mainstream services, focus on youth development approach (CCHRC, 2002)
- Provision of safe and secure housing (CCHRC, 2002)
- Increase in public education and awareness (CCHRC, 2002)
- Early intervention programs at the school and community level (CCHRC, 2002)
- Enhanced collaboration with law enforcement, including specialized training and education to better understand the dynamics of sex work and sexual exploitation (CCHRC, 2002)

Promising Responses

PEERS – The Prostitutes Empowerment, Education and Resource Society, Victoria, British Columbia

PEERS is a non-profit society established by former prostitutes and community supporters to assist individuals exit the trade in Victoria. While PEERS is not exclusively a youth oriented agency, it supports and trains youth, focusing on building confidence and skills to help individuals make informed decisions around their behaviors and beliefs. The main activities of PEERS include outreach, public education, peer support/drop in and research. Key insights learned include the need to encourage and implement peer counselling and mentoring, provision of emergency services and safe housing, and emergency services 24/7.

CEASE, Edmonton, Alberta

CEASE, the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation, works in collaboration with the community, government, law enforcement and others to provide the tools to help women heal from exploitation and sex trafficking, rebuild their lives, and create bridges over poverty. Their mandate is to foster a community where there is hope, respect, and transformation for individuals, families, and communities affected by sexual exploitation, sex trafficking and social inequality in Edmonton. To this end, CEASE's work focuses on creating positive strategies to reduce harm and create hope, including emergency relief, counselling, trauma recovery, public education, civic engagement, and bursaries for individuals working to heal and rebuild their lives after experiencing sexual exploitation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PLANNING AND SCOPING SESSION

On August 27, 2014, a planning and scoping session was held at the University of Alberta, which was attended by approximately 30 participants. Attendees represented Edmonton's youth serving agencies, systems partners, and provincial government.

Overarching participant discussion highlighted key themes that focused on: housing and supports, prevention and sustainability, and integrated system of care. The following recommendations have been categorized into the three themes and synthesized for succinctness, allowing for clearer identification of priorities. All recommendations connect to goals and strategies of the preliminary strategy to end youth homelessness, which strategically aligns with the provincial and municipal ten year plans to end homelessness and the Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports 2011-2015.

Housing & Supports

Overarching feedback indicated the need to develop clear pathways and transitions along a continuum of housing options for youth, including access to long term and appropriate services and supports based upon the needs and acuity of the youth. Importantly, care plans should be developed from strengths and relationship-based approaches that include harm reduction and trauma informed practice and which are ultimately youth centered.

Housing

- Develop an inventory list of available housing options and eligibility criteria
- Ensure housing options are situated along a continuum, which allow youth to progress towards independent living and/or permanent supportive housing. Essential that youth have access to appropriate and flexible housing, which meets their needs and is adaptable with changing needs.
- Increase the amount of congregate supportive housing units available to youth to ensure that those with complex needs are being adequately supported, including continuing care options. An increase in congregate supportive housing addresses the gap that has been identified in relation to youth in high-risk situations and with complex needs and barriers to housing. Example provided: those living with FASD and active addictions cannot successfully live independently in the community.

Supports

- Systems and agency wide adoption of harm reduction approach.
- Develop support and outreach services that youth can access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These services would include case management, mental health and addictions teams, housing support, and emergency services.

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- Standardized training for frontline staff and social workers, premised upon relationship-based, trauma informed and child development approaches. Standardization enables for consistent messaging and service delivery throughout the system of care.
- Develop training for youth that focuses upon daily living skills, as this is essential for the healthy and successful transition into adulthood.
- Increase mental health and addictions supports for youth. Imperative that health systems establish leading role and enhance partnerships with youth serving agencies.
- Supports must be holistic in nature, addressing the psychological, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs and wellbeing of young individuals. Within this model, the holistic approach is long term, provisioning for stability and continuity, which helps foster trusting relationships and ensures that youth remain connected to services and supports.
- All care planning and service delivery must be youth centered, working from the model of meaningful youth engagement and participation from planning to delivery.
- Supports must focus on child development and social assets perspectives. While the youth perspective and voice is instrumental in contributing to community wisdom, it is also important to understand that youth are in developmental and transitional stages.
- Ensure integrated approach to assessments, including engagement and information sharing with youth around complex needs and barriers, particularly around brain trauma. Incorporating youth empowerment within the engagement spectrum enables youth to better understand their conditions and situations, which ties into life skills which can be used in their daily lives.
- Enhance coordination with representatives from Persons with Developmental Disabilities and AISH to help youth successfully navigate complex systems and services and reduce stigmas.
- Ensure that after care supports are established and maintained for youth before they reach 24 years of age.
- Enhance services for youth who are gang involved, particularly supports and housing assistance, given the barriers youth with legal backgrounds and involvement face.
- Ensure adequate supports and services for parenting youth.

Prevention & Sustainability

Overarching feedback indicated the need to enhance Aboriginal perspectives and historical contexts in prevention mechanisms that utilize cultural safety and competency practices. Increased education and awareness campaigns in schools and for the wider public around the pathways and complex issues of youth homelessness, with increased attention to the challenges faced by LGBTQ self-identified youth, newcomers, gang involved, and sexually exploited youth.

- Inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives within prevention models, which are holistic and which address family homelessness, as many Aboriginal youth end up homeless because the family is homeless.

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- Include prevention measures and practices that incorporate and address Aboriginal historical contexts (such as residential schools) and current social conditions. Increase understanding around contexts for First Nations communities to bridge the disconnect between urban and rural prevention strategies.
- Increase collaboration with Aboriginal communities (rural and urban) to share learnings and information about homelessness
- Inclusion of newcomer perspectives and challenges that address social contexts and family challenges.
- Increase education and awareness on the pathways into youth homelessness, especially around addictions and mental health and healthy relationships and boundaries. Awareness campaigns and early education to inform educators, general public, family and youth on homelessness.
- Zero discharge policy must be extended to family unit, as discharge is not only implicit on systems discharge.
- Prevention programs and initiatives must be in collaboration with systems, community, family and youth.
- Enhance education, awareness and training on behaviors that result from trauma
- Enhance services and awareness around mental health, addictions, LGBTQ, Aboriginal, Sexually exploited and Gang-involved social contexts and realities.
- Increased educational supports and programming for youth to complete education.
- Explore Cultural safety approaches that contextualize the issues of urban migration from rural areas
- Adopt and implement a zero percent discharge policy

Integrated System of Care

Overarching feedback indicated the necessity to maintain and strengthen collaborative partnerships between systems and community partners. Recommendation also focused on exploring ways to bridge the supports and funding gaps between youth in care and youth not in care.

- Continue to strengthen collaborations between systems and community partners.
- Ensure framework is youth centered.
- Explore the barriers, gaps and disconnects in services, supports and options available to youth in care and youth not in care.
- Explore funding models as they relate to youth in care and youth not in care.
- Develop a youth advisory committee.
- Develop a resources and service map/inventory for youth and youth serving agencies to enable clearer understandings of what services and supports are available, including criteria eligibility.

Immediate Priorities

- Youth only warming centres to offer provision of basic services/needs for youth including warm clothing, winter gear, food, first aid, showers, laundry and personal storage

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- Single point of entry concept – key network and resource hub for youth to connect to addiction and mental health services, supports and shelter or short term accommodation, housing and linkages to programming offered by community and government based providers
- Understand pathways into youth homelessness
- Map Edmonton’s agency and systems resources for youth
- Develop a youth advisory/focus committee
- Early intervention in schools and enhanced collaboration between social agencies and schools
- Enhance staff training (client centered – youth driven, child development approaches, relationship-based approaches, trauma informed, harm reduction) and knowledge sharing
- Adopt universal harm reduction approach
- Safe shelters for youth that are low barrier

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APPENDIX B

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE COMMUNITY PLANNING SESSION

On September 24, 2014, a community planning session was held at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society. Approximately 70 participants were in attendance, representing community organizations, Edmonton-wide youth serving agencies, Alberta Health Services, housing agencies, City of Edmonton and departments from the Government of Alberta.

Overarching participant discussion highlighted key themes that focused on: housing and supports, prevention, sustainability, integrated systems planning, information sharing and mobilization, Family First, Harm Reduction and a community HUB for youth. The following recommendations have been categorized into broad themes and synthesized for succinctness. All recommendations connect to goals and strategies of the preliminary strategy to end youth homelessness, which strategically aligns with the provincial and municipal ten year plans to end homelessness and Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports 2011-2015.

Priority Areas of Focus

- Increase in safe places for youth
- Holistic and comprehensive approach to youth homelessness
- Understanding and incorporating youth perspectives
- Youth engagement and empowerment
- Sustainable mechanisms and measures to end homelessness at policy and service delivery level

Defining ‘high-risk’ youth

- Redefining ‘high-risk’ as it is the behaviours and situations that are high-risk, not the youth themselves.
- Need to shift thinking away from punishment and consequence models towards trauma informed and relationship-based practices
- Increased attention towards programming that addresses behaviours
- Flexibility in programming and services that allow youth to experience adolescence and childhood

Numbers of most vulnerable youth

- Estimation that 500-600 homeless youth in city, with approximately 30-40 youth in high-risk situations

Geographical Differences

- While youth may have geographical areas which they classify as safe or high-risk and where they regularly access services or supports, there is still mobility as youth transit the city
- Geographical barriers are minimal

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Trends

- Both south and downtown youth serving agencies are seeing an increase of Aboriginal youth migrating to Edmonton from surround reserves and provinces
- Increase in chronic homeless youth with complex needs and high-risk behaviours and situations
- Increase in LGBTQ self-identified youth
- Increase in violent and destructive behaviours

Integrated Systems

- Understand root and systemic causes of youth homelessness
- Complex family issues are often the root causes of youth in high-risk situations
- Integrate relationship-based approaches throughout system of care
- Prioritize collaboration within sector

Barriers & Gaps

- Streamline navigation and flow for youth through health, justice and education systems

Information Sharing

- Interagency information sharing and mobilization, eliminate silos
- Open and transparent communication amongst all stakeholders

Recommendations for systems committee

- Youth centered, youth agency and empowerment – youth are an essential resource
- Regional planning, information sharing, coordinated long term service plans and funding
- Amendments to funding models to reduce barriers to youth not in care
- Planned and immediate action – systems change evolves slowly over time, finding a balance

Youth Hub

- Map existing resources to reduce duplication
- Providing services and supports in a centralized location enables easier navigation and access to resources
- Establish stable relationships and mentorship through consistent and long term staffing/workers
- Incorporate peer mentorship
- Housing workers available
- Inclusion of sex positive attitudes, address needs of young mothers and gang intervention

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Congregate Supportive Housing – NOVA as ideal model

- NOVA has proven successful as initial supportive phase, however a second NOVA that is a next stage to independent living and which focuses on life skills and development is required
- Currently, all stages of change are under one roof at NOVA, ideally having different stages of living in distinct housing units with appropriate supports

Harm Reduction Approach

- CFSS – High-risk Youth Initiative is rooted in harm reduction
- Empowers youth and focuses on strengths based assets
- AHS treatment model is harm reduction model

Family First

- Family reunification an important piece and should be included in the housing and supports spectrum, however youth in high-risk situations often leave home due to complex family issues
- Encourage youth to aspire to reconnect if there are healthy relationships or relationships that can be fostered redefine family based upon an individual's understanding and definition of family, extending beyond biological associations
- Assessments of family unit for possibility of building health relationships and boundaries

Access to Health

- Improve access and navigation to long term health support, particularly mental health and addiction

Housing

- Need for transitional housing as a first step along the continuum of housing options
- Terra operating different stages of housing successfully
- Increase in available permanent housing
- Increase scatter site housing
- Emergency beds with lockers and laundry facilities – WER
- Increase land lord relations
- McMann can assist with Housing First

Parenting Youth

- Needs to be included within youth subpopulations

Prevention

- Focus on early intervention, explore core issues of broken families as early solutions to prevention
- Zero discharge policy

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- Early intervention/prevention in schools – connect schools with agencies, provide education around homelessness and early indicators, causes
- Increase resources for AHS counsellors, mental health therapists in schools
- Reach high-risk families as early intervention
- Education youth on evictions and rehousing, shift thinking around evictions – stages of independence, skills building and decision making
- McMann can offer guidelines and ways forward with early intervention tools

Aboriginal

- Increase understanding around the historical and generational traumas experienced by Aboriginal peoples

Supports

- Relationship building
- Creative and recreational involvement and access
- EPL can help develop literacy programs

Identifying Next Steps

- Youth involvement in planning
- Winter warming centres – youth safe places
- Agencies to meet to understand what each agency specialized in and services offered, which will identify gaps and areas to focus resources
- Incorporation of relationship-based practices throughout system of care
- Focus on prevention and early intervention
- Focus on sustainability – long term funding and resources
- Define who agencies are triaging, also extend typology to include brain injury/biological factors- requires different approaches and see different successes

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APPENDIX C

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE YOUTH CONSULTATION

On January 22, 2015, a youth consultation was held at the Stanley Milner Library. The youth consultation was designed to provide youth with an opportunity to share their ideas and experiences of homelessness. Approximately 21 participants were in attendance, representing a diverse cross section of youth. The recruitment process involved collaborations amongst local youth serving agencies who shared information with youth about the consultation. Recruitment also consisted of

Overarching participant discussion highlighted key themes that focused on: housing and supports, prevention, sustainability, integrated systems planning, information sharing and mobilization, Family First, Harm Reduction and a community HUB for youth. The following recommendations have been categorized into broad themes and synthesized for succinctness. All recommendations connect to goals and strategies of the preliminary strategy to end youth homelessness, which strategically aligns with the provincial and municipal ten year plans to end homelessness and Edmonton Area Community Plan on Housing and Supports 2011-2015.

Priority Areas of Focus

- Increase in safe places for youth and housing options
- Understanding and incorporating youth perspectives
- Youth engagement and empowerment

Quotes

“I’ve been trying to get a place on my own for seven years”

“It’s like we don’t have a voice, it’s so annoying.”

“It’s hard for people with mental illness to get a job and keep it.”

“We can’t get if we don’t have a place? Where are we supposed to go if we are sick from our addictions?”

“I haven’t taken my bi-polar medication in almost two weeks because I can’t afford it.”

“When it comes to housing, age shouldn’t matter.”

“They laugh at you. They don’t want to help.”

BARRIERS

Housing

- People there [in the housing] – don’t get along with other people living in the room or don’t get along with staff.
- Money wise (i.e., how much it costs)
 - It’s expensive!
 - They are building an arena – we need housing, not an arena.
- It’s hard to do things alone.

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- There are not enough safe shelters for people to sleep in. A safe shelter is a place for having a roof over your head, place to put your stuff down and go for a walk. When you're homeless your belongings go missing, people steal your stuff.
 - No room or no vacancies.
 - More affordable housing is needed.
 - Increase in youth housing options and supports
 - Need access to social workers, as they are hard to find or expensive
 - Establish house rules, youth can sign an agreement and follow rules
 - Ideal housing would be congregate with supports
 - Wait lists
 - No income, no place, no place, no income
 - Eligibility criteria – means that choices are limited often to things that don't work for youth
 - Expectation, housing to fit certain criteria to get help
 - Ability to have boyfriend over, can't do that now under rules

Recommendations

- Buy apartment building and rent to youth exclusively with staff and supports with someone to check on apartment from time to time.
- Housing needs some structure
- Cluster youth together, our issues are the same sometimes

Healthcare

- Cannot access healthcare with no ID.
- No social workers. When you're 21 to 22, social workers stop helping. At age 18, you have a volunteer agreement with Child and Welfare.
- Not enough funds.
- False and conflicting diagnosis, poor access to medications
- Can't afford medication
- Healthcare is the easiest thing to get, but not for mental health care
- Mental health care medication should be covered in Alberta

Legal Aid

- If you have a long and bad criminal record, legal aid won't help.
- Not enough funds for a lawyer.

School/Education

- Not having good enough grades to go to post-secondary.
- If you don't have a home to do your work.
- Substance abuse can lead to dropping out.
- Often a choice between staying in school or getting a job – financial challenge/survival over education.
- Needs to be education around life skills, but classes need to be focused on special needs

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- Need to understand how to deal with money when you do get a job and how to continue to improve yourself

Employment/Getting a Job

- Not having enough experience on your resume in order to get a job – a shitty resume.
- Look at my background, they choose the person who has enough experience. That’s why I volunteer.
- Probed for struggles or barriers for looking for job postings, interviews, applying for jobs and participants had “no issues” or additional comments.

Income

- Can’t get a hold of income workers
- Financial instability

Recommendation

- Hub-lite focused on financial management

Trauma

- Family life and abuse – increase access/need for family counselling

Families/Reconciliation

- Caseworkers needed to help facilitate reconciliation, but only if possible, might not be possible for all youth

Pathways into Homelessness

- Trauma
- Emotional trauma
- Mental illness and stigma against therapy
- Wanting to be independent/go on their own
- Financial problems at home
- Justice

Law and Justice

- Challenges with cops and peace officers, you get tickets and then get a record
 - Potential solution is to give youth training of how to interact with cops and peace officers
- Police always harassing my friends
- Police commenting on how we are and how we look
- I would call an officer I already knew, if I just call 911 things go bad
- Don’t trust police
- At certain place, we know the security and will talk to them, but other places we know to stay away

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Aging Out

- Aging out means separation from friends and lots of supports
- There needs to be a means by which supports are replaced as they move into adulthood

Social

- Competition over resources, people who are better at talking are able to get opportunities
- We are thrown into a huge group, homeless, with people who have nothing to do with us
- Friends are your family
- Being in an environment where people drag you down means that everything gets spoiled

Biggest barriers

- Long wait times – when you are homeless you don't have time to wait – if youth involved in the process it would probably go faster
- Need faster access to services, most important thing

OPPORTUNITIES

Housing

- there are subsidies but don't know much about them, but housing is still unaffordable
- there's Metis Housing, Aboriginal Housing, but no Youth Housing
- need to have youth housing with skills attached
 - housing with programming in the evenings (cooking, cleaning)
- Outreach workers
- School
- Social workers – helped find appropriate programming. iHuman workers has helped find appropriate programming.
- Parents and other family members (e.g., auntie)
- Community support workers
- Group home staff (e.g., residential coordinator)

Health

- sometimes not financially stable enough to afford insurance for therapy
- everything comes down to health, mental health is so important, but so hard to access

School/Education

- depends on school, outside inner city, don't hear anything about youth homelessness
- schools need to have resources/info on homelessness, services/supports
 - beneficial to have youth go into schools to talk about homelessness

Employment

- job prospects are good in Edmonton compared to elsewhere
- more jobs in trades

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- difficult to get experience for jobs
- education/schools helping with employment skills
- more job fairs for high schools?

Agency Support

- iHuman:
 - empowers youth, access to cultural things, self-expression
 - positive outlet, free space, safe from police
- Support workers, youth workers, support

IDEAL SITUATION

- Low cost of housing
- Having more supports, like the Co-op on Whyte Avenue
- More shelters for youth beyond YESS
- More groups or organizations that provide housing
- Having more winter warming houses
- Lack of transitional housing for youth – having more transitional housing
- Listening to what the youth have to say.
- Bridge gap between youth community and agencies and adults
- More youth led, youth involved things
- Youth voice in all decision making at all levels
- Community engagement to reduce stigma against youth in the community
- Write letters to counsellors about homelessness experiences, lobby
- Transitional housing needed
- YESS confused about its role, too much coddling
- Needs to be programs that mimic real life, like co-ed programs
- Life skills development needed
- Meet youth where they are at, don't force them
- Have peer mentors
- Apartment complex for youth with access to all health, mental health and addictions

Additional comments

- Having it so youth can live on their own by having lower costs to housing.
- Having more recreational facilities
- More places to go
- Having the opportunity to have more work experiences.
- It feels like at Nexus its not first come first serve, but based on staff choosing
- Having a curfew is important for personal safety.

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What is not working

- The judicial system – youth ending up in jail or getting fines for not having bus tickets.
- Need more addiction workers and mental health specialists that they will listen to them
- Age is major barrier to getting a place

IDENTIFYING NEXT STEPS

Youth Hub

- Youth **hub** is great for knowledge and resources
- Need to include more active approaches, get youth involved, engaged
- Idea to have initial temporary workers, like outreach workers, who get people talking, like a case worker, but only for initial stage then youth are directed to resources they need or want, helps build relationship

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