

*Chapter 1:
Stories from the streets.*



Canada is nearing an important crossroads in our response to homelessness. Since homelessness emerged as a significant problem – in fact, as a crisis – in the 1990s, with the withdrawal of the federal government’s investment in affordable housing, communities have struggled to respond. Declining wages (even minimum wage has not kept up with inflation in any jurisdiction in Canada), reduced benefit levels—including pensions and social assistance—and a shrinking supply of affordable housing have placed more and more Canadians at risk of homelessness. For a small, but significant group of Canadians facing physical and mental health challenges, the lack of housing and supports is driving increases in homelessness. Prevention measures – such as ‘rent banks’ and ‘energy banks’ that are designed to help people maintain their housing – are not adequate in stemming the flow to homelessness. The result has been an explosion in homelessness as a visible and seemingly ever present problem.



Over the past 10 years we have learned much about what to do to end homelessness – the need to shift from a focus on managing the problem (through an over-reliance on emergency services and supports) to a strategy that emphasizes prevention and, for those who do become homeless, to move them quickly into housing with necessary supports. The success of the At Home/Chez Soi project demonstrates that with housing and the right supports, chronically homeless people can become and remain housed. While there are still areas that need work – we need more robust solutions for youth homelessness, women fleeing violence and Aboriginal homelessness – we are figuring out solutions on the intervention side.



The one missing piece of the puzzle, however, is affordable housing. The decline in availability of low cost housing (and in particular, rental housing) affects many Canadians – young people setting out on their own, single parents, people working for low wages and the elderly. It also contributes to the homelessness problem in a significant way.

The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014 sets the course for ending homelessness in Canada.

We know quite well what factors have contributed to the dramatic increase in homelessness over the past 25 years. Since we know what the problem is, we can propose the solution.



Fundamentals of Advocacy

Too often not-for-profit organizations spend a great deal of time and energy focusing on public awareness of a need. To be true, there are times when this is the most important advocacy work. However public awareness of need is of two hardest advocacy goals to accomplish. Furthermore, awareness of a need is of little value unless there is an accompanying notion of what actually needs to be done about it/

the ways in which no-for-profit organizations goes about advocacy work depends greatly on the nature of the organization and what its advocacy objectives are. However there is a suite foundational activities that all advocacy organica-tion should undertake if they wish to be effective with their advocacy efforts. These are:

- Be clear on the facts of the issue
- Articulate what you are trying to accomplish
- Articulate who your target audience are.



Despite escalating real estate prices and low rental vacancy, Edmonton's homeless numbers are stable, says a non-profit organization that works to fill housing needs.

According to the 2014 Homeless Count, 2,252 Edmontonians are currently homeless – up 78 people, or 3.5 per cent, from last year.

Homeless camps surge, forcing city to hire more social workers

More help needed for homeless veterans in Edmonton

City on track to see 'homeless crisis,' Iveson says

Homeless people living in camps on city outskirts

Edmonton plan to end homelessness hits bumps

Of the people living without homes, 16 per cent moved to Edmonton within the last year. Nearly half of the homeless individuals counted identify as aboriginal.

The number of people living on the street in Edmonton has gone down by 27 per cent since the city implemented it plans to end homelessness in 2008.

Although the numbers show the city is going in the right direction, there is still work to do, Susan McGee, the CEO of Homeward Trust Edmonton, said in a release Friday.

"Those pressures remain. With more than 2200 Edmontonians without a home, we are reminded that we still have lots of work to do, and cannot become complacent as a community."

While the count showed there are fewer people relying on provisional housing and couch surfing, emergency shelter use increased this year, as did the number of youth and families who do not have a home.

"The count results tell an important story about people who are experiencing homelessness and where we need to put our efforts as a community" said McGee.

"Over the next year, we will focus additional resources on rapid rehousing to reduce the pressure on emergency shelters. We will also focus on culturally appropriate housing and supports for Aboriginal peoples, and focused interventions for families and youth."

In the past year, Edmonton's population has grown by 7.4 per cent.

