Helping Inform the Government of Canada's Approach to Ending Chronic Homelessness

Infrastructure Canada
November 2, 2022

Background

Government of Canada Commitments - Chronic Homelessness

- 2020 Speech from the Throne (SFT): announced its commitment to focus on "entirely eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada"

- 2021 Budget and SFT: reaffirmed its commitment to work with partners to end chronic homelessness in Canada

- Budget 2022: made significant additional investments that will help make continued progress towards the goal to "eliminate chronic homelessness by 2030"

Actioned Responses

- Policy design and program development related to additional investments

- Engagement with various stakeholders and partners to inform next steps in the pursuit of eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada

Winter 2021 Preliminary Engagement - Objectives and Learnings

- Take stock of existing efforts and investments; identify key opportunities and barriers; and begin discussions on approaches to eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada

- Feedback from preliminary engagement activities identified six key gaps to reaching this goal:

  1. A limited supply of deeply affordable and supportive housing;

  2. A need to focus on upstream prevention;

  3. Insufficient resources for the homeless-serving sector;

  4. A need for greater coordination and integration with partners;

  5. There are limitations with the quality and availability of data on homelessness; and,

  6. Indigenous homelessness is distinct and requires Indigenous-led (or co-led) activities.

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Spring 2022 Engagement: Overview & Objectives

- Given the shared responsibility for housing and homelessness across all orders of government and the significant role external partners play, further engagement was required

Overarching Objectives:

- Deepen the collective understanding of the gaps identified through previous engagements, including in the areas of prevention, housing, supports and tailored approaches, data and measurement and innovation

- Build a shared understanding of what is required (key components) to eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada and inform a way forward to achieve this goal

- Help inform housing and homelessness programming and policy design and support the successful implementation of budget measures

Spring 2022 Engagement: Approach

- Joint engagement plan developed by Infrastructure Canada (INFC) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), including engagement led by the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion

- Engagement activities include:
  - Ongoing discussions with other federal departments responsible for complementary portfolios, including Health Canada, Veterans Affairs Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada, etc.;
  - Bilateral engagement with Provinces and Territories;
  - Thematic roundtables with key stakeholders from the housing and homelessness sector, including people with lived experience of homelessness;
  - Engagement with municipalities, in collaboration with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities;
  - Engagement with the Reaching Home National Indigenous Council;
  - Further engagement with other Indigenous partners and leaders.

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Spring 2022 Engagement: Discussion themes

Key themes guiding the second phase of engagement on chronic homelessness included:

1. Prevention;

2. Clients and Housing;

3. Supports;

4. Tailored approaches;

5. Data and measurement; and,

6. Innovation.

Discussion themes: Prevention

Objectives

- Determine how to consider the roles of different partners involved to ensure that experiences of homelessness are brief and non-recurring
- Identify and share a common understanding of the inflows into homelessness and how best to address them

Example Questions

1. What is the most significant source of inflow into homelessness from your experience? What is needed to improve this understanding?
2. What are the greatest barriers to quickly identifying those at risk of homelessness? How can they be overcome?
3. What does successful collaboration with other sectors look like in order to identify those at risk of homelessness?
4. What are the most effective models or tools to prevent inflows into homelessness? Are these changing as a result of the pandemic?

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Discussion themes: Clients and Housing

Objectives

- To better understand housing needs along the continuum, program gaps, and opportunities to complement existing federal investments

Example Questions

1. How can federal investments be better leveraged to accelerate reductions in the number of people experiencing homelessness?
2. What gaps or barriers exist that impede efforts to efficiently house individuals experiencing chronic homelessness?
3. Beyond funding, what steps can all orders of government take to encourage the creation of more supportive housing?
4. What supports are needed to improve the collection, alignment, and use of data as a tool for matching those in need with appropriate housing and supports?

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Discussion themes: Supports and Tailored Approaches

Objectives

- To build a better understanding of support needs
- To ensure wrap-around services are aligned across sectors

Example Questions

1. How can data be used to better understand whether the needs of individuals are being met, and how can it inform program and service decisions?
2. What are the main service gaps experienced by specific populations in your community (e.g., Indigenous peoples, women, youth, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, those using substances)?
3. What actions can be taken by the various orders of government to help address service gaps experienced by specific populations?
4. What measures can be taken by the various orders of government to support efforts to address homelessness in rural and remote parts of Canada?

Engagement with other orders of governments
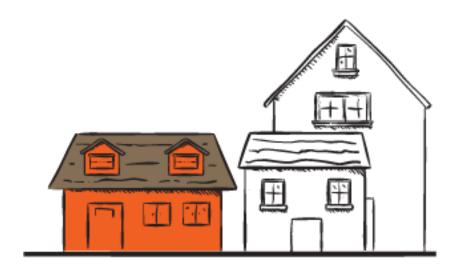
Objectives

- To discuss strategies undertaken to address homelessness in other jurisdictions
- To Identify barriers and challenges at various levels of government
- To determine areas where changes may be needed to support efforts from different players in further reducing and preventing homelessness, and support the development of affordable housing

Example Questions

1. How can all orders of government (Indigenous, municipal, provincial/territorial and federal) improve collaboration, and alignment of programming and priorities to eliminate chronic homelessness?
2. What cross-sectoral partnerships are needed to eliminate chronic homelessness in your jurisdiction, and how can the federal government help foster these connections?

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KEY FINDINGS – SPRING 2022 CHRONIC ENGAGEMENT

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Key Findings: Prevention

Many sources of inflow into homelessness

- Poverty (rising costs of living, lack of rising income), transitions between systems and the ongoing impacts of colonialization on Indigenous people

Key Identified Gaps and Recommendations

- Need for greater interdepartmental and intergovernmental collaboration and coordination;
- Need for a systemic review that would lead to the implementation of coordinated, integrated data-driven supports;
- Need for greater availability of, and access to affordable housing; and,
- Need to address stigma.

Examples of effective models or approaches

- Direct community supports to individuals who are already housed help ensure housing can be maintained and homelessness avoided (value of upstream prevention);
- Coordinated and risk-informed support systems;
- Trauma informed care and use of more tailored, wrap around supports; and,
- Access to flexible funding that can be directed based on individual client's needs.

Key Findings: Clients & Housing

Key Identified Gaps and Recommendations

- Need for greater interdepartmental and intergovernmental alignment (housing and homelessness);

- Need for increased number of deeply affordable housing units; and,

- Need for operating funding, over and beyond capital investments.

Examples of effective models or approaches

- Housing with wrap-around supports, including consideration of past and present traumas, reduce risks of returns to homelessness;

- Successful anti-discrimination and anti-racism policies are essential for a well-functioning housing system;

- A successful mixed model development approach, including both affordable and market rental, requires partnerships between housing developers, builders, landlords, referral agencies and coordinators; and,

- An acquisition fund or right of first refusal are potential tools that could help address the decrease in affordable housing units.

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Key Findings: Supports & Tailored Approaches

Key Identified Gaps and Recommendations

- Need for more resources to provide diverse services and programming to meet the unique needs of people experiencing homelessness (Indigenous people, people with multiple barriers, people with complex needs, etc.);

- Need for more deeply affordable and supportive housing options;

- Need for increased alignment across sectors and between all levels of government; and,

- Need for data gaps and limitations to be addressed.

Examples of effective models or approaches

- Flexibility in programing and funding enables supports and services to be directed based on individual clients needs and where they are needed most;

- Culturally appropriate supports and trauma-informed approaches are key to individuals obtaining and retaining housing; and,

- Coordination of services and supports, as well as the sharing of data across local entities, enable a more tailored response to homelessness, including for those individuals with more complex needs.

APPLIED LEARNINGS – ACTION RESEARCH

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Action Research: Background

- In Budget 2022, the Government of Canada identified a target of ending chronic homelessness by 2030

- Among other key investments to reach this goal, an announcement of $18 million over three years was made to conduct research on additional measures that could support communities in eliminating chronic homelessness

- The research offers an opportunity to better understand key areas identified by communities and stakeholders as posing significant challenges in efforts to prevent and reduce chronic homelessness

- Findings will contribute to broad-scale learning and knowledge-sharing across communities and support the development of a broader strategy to eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada

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Action Research: Objectives

- Reaching Home communities have made progress towards the implementation of Coordinated Access and transitioning to an outcomes-based approach

- However, communities continue to experience persistent barriers to addressing chronic homelessness

- Thus, the Action Research Initiative, led through Infrastructure Canada, seeks to:

  - Identify and document persistent barriers to preventing homelessness;

  - Test potential approaches to addressing these barriers while documenting successes and challenges; and,

  - Reduce chronic homelessness experienced at the community-level.

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Action Research – Priority Areas

1. **Collaboration**: explore ways to improve buy-in across actors; having relevant actors working together towards a joint plan-of-action

2. **System alignment**: explore strategies to improve systems-level alignment or to support effective inter-sectional prioritization of people experiencing or at-risk of chronic homelessness

3. **Data**: identify opportunities to improve data literacy at the community level; explore solutions to address concerns related to data sharing and sovereignty

* Within these areas of study, focus may be placed on how challenges vary across **specific populations** and/or how to better address barriers faced by these populations (e.g., Indigenous peoples, youth, women, seniors, and/or 2SLGBTQ+ individuals)

Action Research – Research Sites

- A shortlist of Reaching Home communities was developed based on indicators demonstrating a community's readiness to test new processes or activities beyond Reaching Home requirements

- A total of 23 shortlisted communities and their respective provinces and territories were engaged in late summer and early fall 2022. These discussions will help inform the selection of potential Action Research sites

- It is expected that between five and 10 sites will be identified as part of this exercise. Communities identified as Action Research sites would receive a portion of the funding earmarked to support them with this initiative

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Action Research – Next steps

- Once the selection of communities has been finalized, projects will be co-developed with funding recipients and identified partners

- Projects are expected to launch Spring 2023, with community-led activities occurring over two fiscal years

- Plans are under development to support communities beyond those participating as sites through knowledge-sharing activities and targeted engagement efforts

THANK YOU!

Questions?

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