

Early Intervention with Youth Connected to the Justice System

Investing in Early and Upstream Efforts to Prevent Youth Homelessness

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— Land Acknowledgement

- We would like to begin by acknowledging that we work and live on Treaty 6 Territory, the traditional and ancestral lands of many First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. We are happy to be here today as guests on the treaty lands and territory of the Wendat, the Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Métis, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and pay tribute to their legacy and the legacy of all First Peoples of Canada, as we strengthen ties with the communities we serve and build the future through learning and cooperation. We acknowledge that we are all treaty people and accept our responsibility to honour all our relations.

Purpose: (why we are here!)

An overview of the Youth Diversion program in Edmonton

1. It will highlight why diversion from the youth justice system, was implemented as part of a housing strategy
2. Showcase the impact of diversion and the success of wrap around supports for the family of the youth
3. It will provide data on the connection between interactions with the justice system by youth and housing instability.
4. It will provide a few key considerations when implementing diversion in your community



Current State of Youth Homelessness In Edmonton



Homelessness in Edmonton:

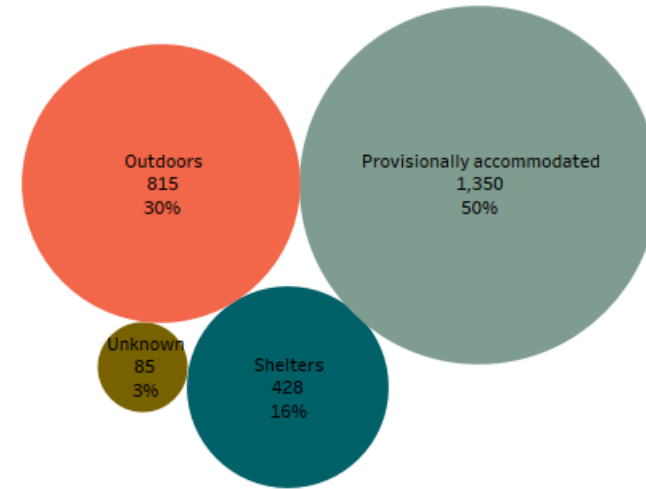
Number of people in Edmonton in September 2022

As of Date: Oct 14, 2022

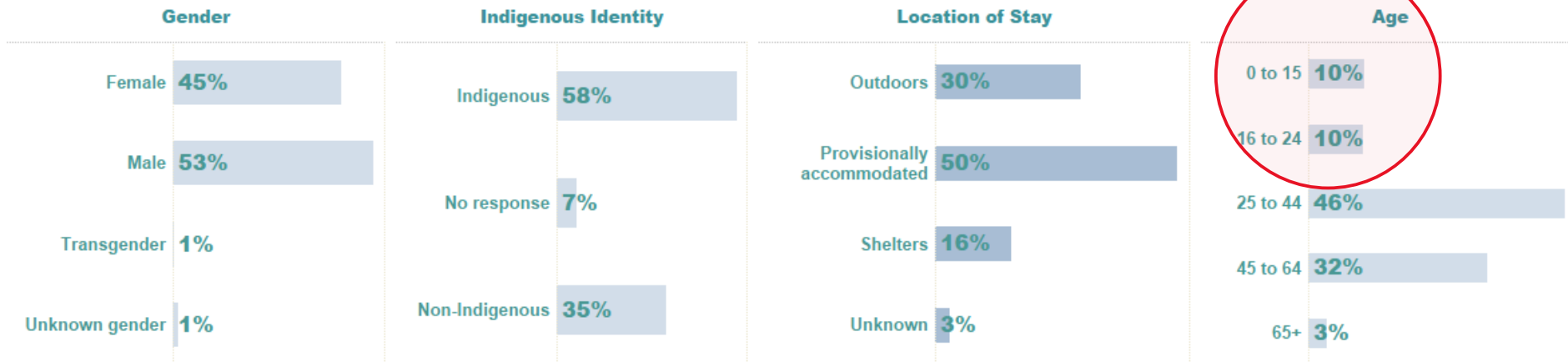
14,894 people were housed through **Housing First** and related programs since **2009**.

Experiencing homelessness **2,678**

newly entering homelessness	housed so far this month	housed in the last 6 months	supported by housing programs
216	57	686	1,650



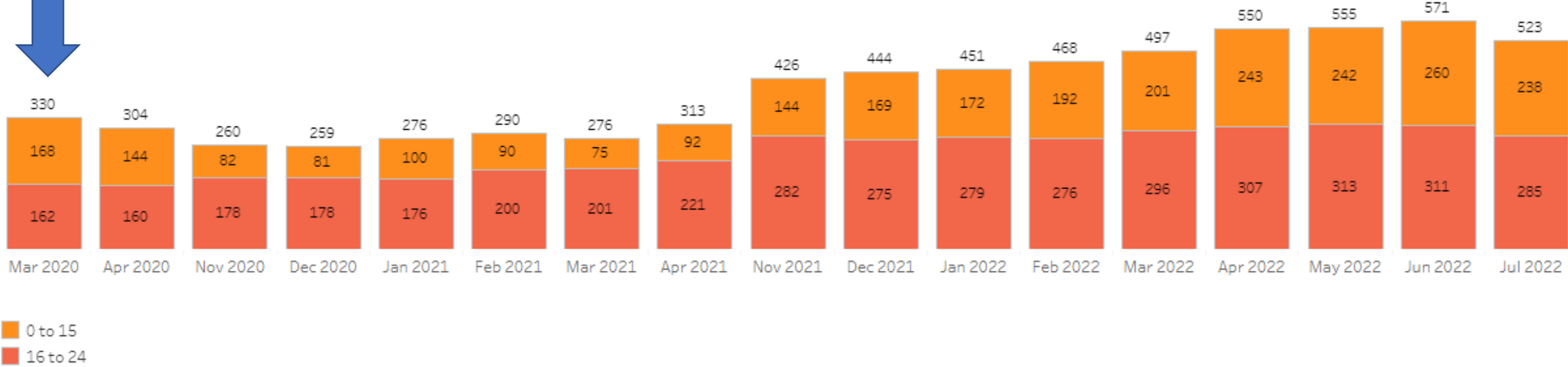
You are viewing a profile of
People currently experiencing homelessness



Homelessness in Edmonton

Youth Homelessness Over Time

Pandemic start
↓



Comprehensive Approach

Leads efforts to end homelessness in Edmonton

- Responsible for stewarding provincial and local plans to end homelessness

- System planning
- Community leadership
- Data and knowledge management (HMIS)
- Evaluation
- Innovation

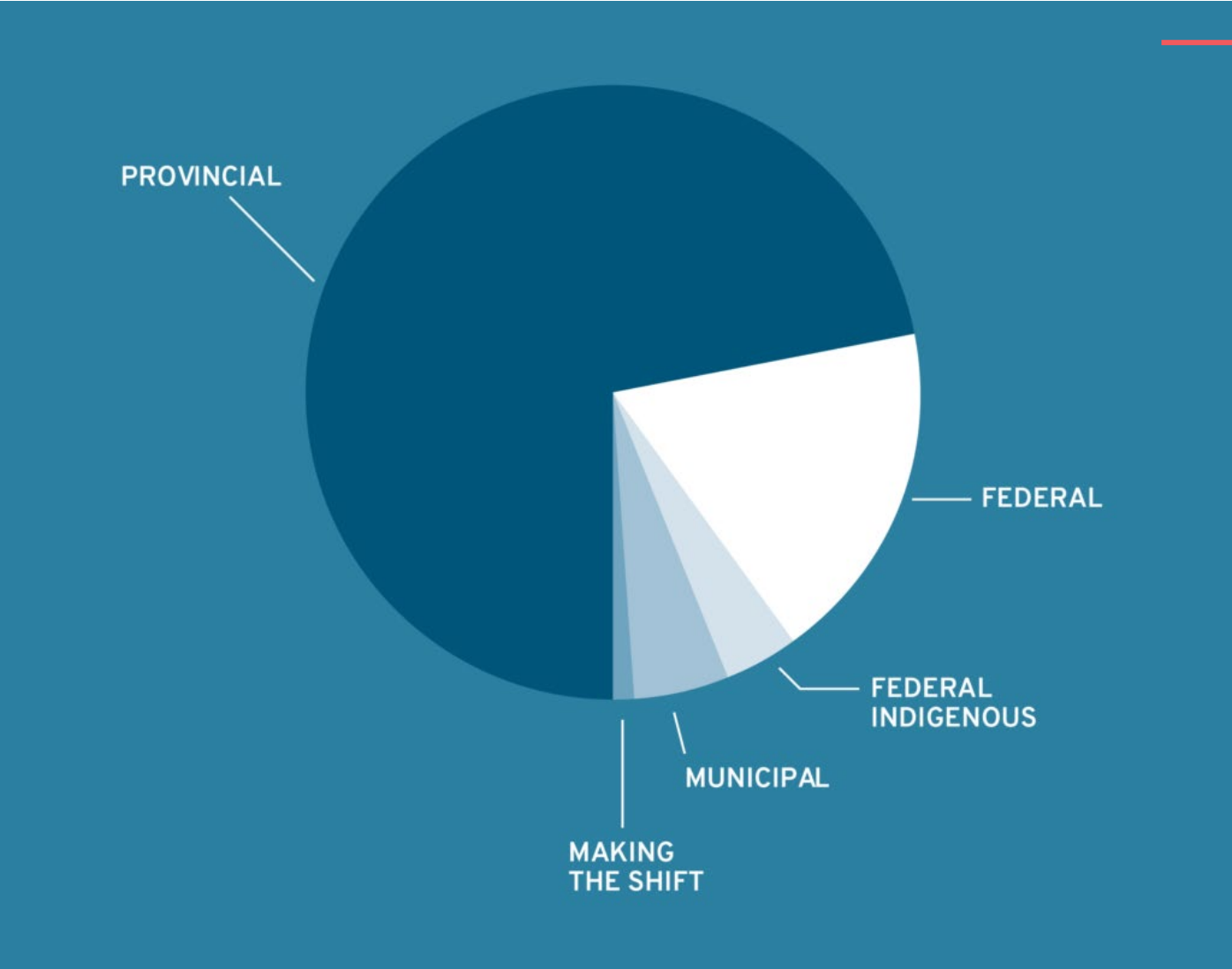


- Stewards and directs funding from 3 orders of government to meet community priorities
- Ensures compliance and contract reporting
- Invests in programs, housing supply, and community capacity

Implementation

- Community planning and engagement
- Review and investment in what works
- Taking risks and learning

How are we addressing Homelessness in Edmonton



Convert Funding into Measurable Outcomes

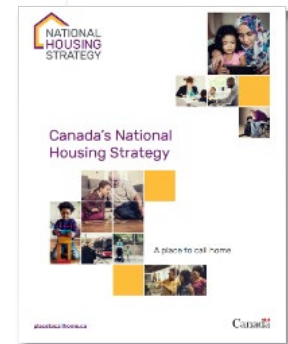
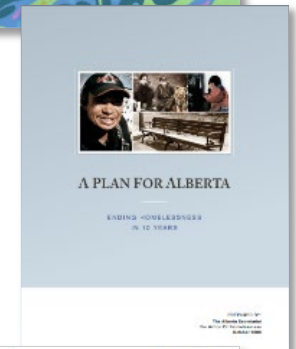
Homeward Trust stewards funding from all three orders of government to meet community priorities by subcontracting community agencies to operate programming.

Using our unique expertise in homelessness prevention and response, as well as an intimate knowledge of the local context and the sector’s capabilities, we convert government dollars into valuable, measurable outcomes.

Guiding Documents

— Local, Provincial and National

- Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action
- Reaching Home & National Housing Strategy
- Government of Alberta: A Plan for Alberta & Edmonton Community Service Delivery Plan
- A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Updated Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness
- Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness
- Homeward Trust Strategic Plan



Why focus on prevention connected to the Justice system?



Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness

3 Pillars to Ending Youth Homelessness

Pillar 1: Integrated System of Care

Pillar 2: Prevention and Sustainability

Pillar 3: Housing and Support Services

Why Prevention and Justice? Why Family and Natural Supports as an approach?

When thinking about prevention of youth homelessness, where do you start?



Principles of Effective Prevention Programs

- **Family-centered:** Based on a respectful, strengths-based approach that views the family as central to the child's well-being.
- **Proactive:** Strive to promote family wellness in families that have not experienced child maltreatment.
- **Theory-Driven:** Have a scientific justification or logical rationale; describe a strategy of how or why the strategy is likely to change behavior.
- **Evidence-based:** Have empirical research supporting their efficacy.
- **Culturally Appropriate:** Tailored to fit within cultural beliefs and practices of specific groups.

Youth experiencing homelessness, require specific support approaches

Adolescents are developmentally distinct from adults¹

Many youth enter homelessness; ²

- from conflict in the family and home.
- with a lack of basic life skills and little or no work experience.
- With distinct legal entitlements and restrictions for Youth under 18 years of age
- And experience high levels of criminal victimization.



Interactions between Police and Youth

- As a group, youth experiencing homelessness, generally hold negative opinions of the police, based on the perception 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 belief that domiciled youth in general do not receive this sort of attention.¹
- With an occurrence of law violation by youths, officers may:²
 - warn youths about the future consequences of continued antisocial and delinquent behavior and release them,
 - divert youths away from system involvement and refer them to community-based services, or
 - arrest youths and refer them to court
- A substantial body of criminological research suggests that interactions between police and youths are often influenced by a convergence of factors, including legal and extralegal factors such as:
 - the characteristics of the environment in which police–youth contact occurs,
 - the characteristics of the officers and the youths involved in the contact,
 - the characteristics of the police organization

YMCA Youth Diversion

*Opportunity for Youth
to Re-Write Their
Stories: Turning a
Negative into a
Positive*



How Youth Diversion Started...

- **Edmonton Police Service connected with YMCA**
- **Pilot with EPS West Division**
- **Completed Approx. 100 Files**
- **Shoplifting Occurrences at West Edmonton Mall**
- **Developing Youth Support Worker and Program Supervisor Positions**
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) & Terms of Reference Created**



What Diversion Looks Like in 2022...

- **City Wide Through 6 EPS Divisions**
- **Collaboration with BGCBigs**
- **Support Referrals/Increased Risk and Complex Cases**
- **Connection to Housing Supports**
- **Importance of Community Resources**
- **Family Support**



Diversion Program Delivery Overview

- **Referral and Intake Process**
- **Agreement Plan**
- **Restorative Justice Approach**
- **Underlying Causes & Individualized Approach**
- **Successful vs Unsuccessful Engagement**
- **Program Goals**



Diversion Connection to Family and Natural Supports

- **Youth Work Does Not Stop With the Youth**
- **Family and Natural Support Improvement**
- **Family Reunification**
- **Implementation of Peacekeeping Circles**



Diversion Connection to Housing

- **Direct and Indirect Housing Supports**
- **Prevention of Homelessness and Impact**
- **Importance of Wrap Around and Follow-Up Supports**



- **KEY TAKE AWAYS:**

-
- **How to identify housing instability when connecting to a youth for a criminal justice offence**
 - **How to engage families when the youth is the focus of the program/referral**
 - **How to start the conversation about diversion with system partners**
 - **Steps/ pieces required to begin diversion in your community**

The YMCA and Homeward Trust are excited to be partners in the Making the Shift project with A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

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The opinions and interpretations in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada

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