



# Primary Prevention of Youth Homelessness

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*“If you deal with a weed problem when it’s still young, when the weeds are just sprouting .... it’s not going to be a problem. But if you let it persist and you let these new additional weeds sprout and blow away in the wind and whatnot, I assume you’ve got a whole garden full of weeds and you kill everything else, right? ...*

*... You could have dealt with the problem when it was really small, but you didn't choose to do that. Now all of a sudden you got a problem, you got to do actions in drastic measures that you never really wanted to do, that were really unnecessary, right?"*

*– Youth Participant*

What is primary prevention?



# Different Levels of Prevention

## Primary Prevention

Addressing structural and systems factors that contribute to instable housing and youth homelessness

## Secondary Prevention

Range of targeted strategies that support youth at risk of homelessness, or who have recently experienced homelessness.

## Tertiary Prevention

Supporting young people who experience homelessness to exit quickly, access housing, and receive the necessary and appropriate supports.

# Primary Drivers of Youth Homelessness

## Structural Factors

- Poverty
- Economic Systems
- Affordable Housing
- Systemic forms of oppression
- Colonialism
- Climate change
- Labour market changes

## Systemic Factors

- Barriers to public services
- Failed transitions from systems
- Silos & gaps between systems and services
- Systems not meeting youth's needs

# Youth Perspectives

A young person is sitting on a cobblestone street, leaning forward with their head resting on their hands. The scene is brightly lit, creating a hazy, high-key atmosphere. The background shows a street with buildings and a car, but they are out of focus. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*“Just anything really that would help make it easier to pay the bills, basically. ‘Cause I know, especially recently, I’ve had to choose a lot between like, getting functional clothing that isn’t torn to shit and being able to buy food.”*





*“A lot of systems are still set up with very residual perspectives in that the bare minimum should be provided to the people who are struggling the most. And that needs to be changed, and public awareness needs to be brought with that.”*



*“A majority of this can be easily prevented if the way of helping these people with income was a lot more accessible.”*

*“Requirements to access help sometimes are so high that some youth can’t access them.”*



*“I know for a lot of people, again, getting welfare, and especially getting to disability, is super difficult and even when it goes through it, it takes a long time, which is a problem because the inherent thing about like, being close to homelessness, is that you don’t have much time.”*

*“Colonization, like if that didn’t happen, I feel like I would be so good.”*

*“The ministry having better trust in like what disabled people are saying that are happening at home because a lot of like, the ministry will go in and investigate but like, [if] the kid’s disabled, they’ll always take the parent’s words over it. And I know that that’s not just me.”*

# Moving Forward





# Primary Drivers of Youth Homelessness – A Case Study

# Method

- Case study / Program Evaluation - Housing First program for youth in Calgary, AB
- 3 ½ years of HMIS intake, discharge and 3-month assessments
  - Including all youth that had been in program at least 24 months (n=22)
- Outcomes Star (n=26)
- Interviews with staff (n=7) and youth (n=8)
- Document review





**POVERTY / INCOME INEQUALITY**



**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



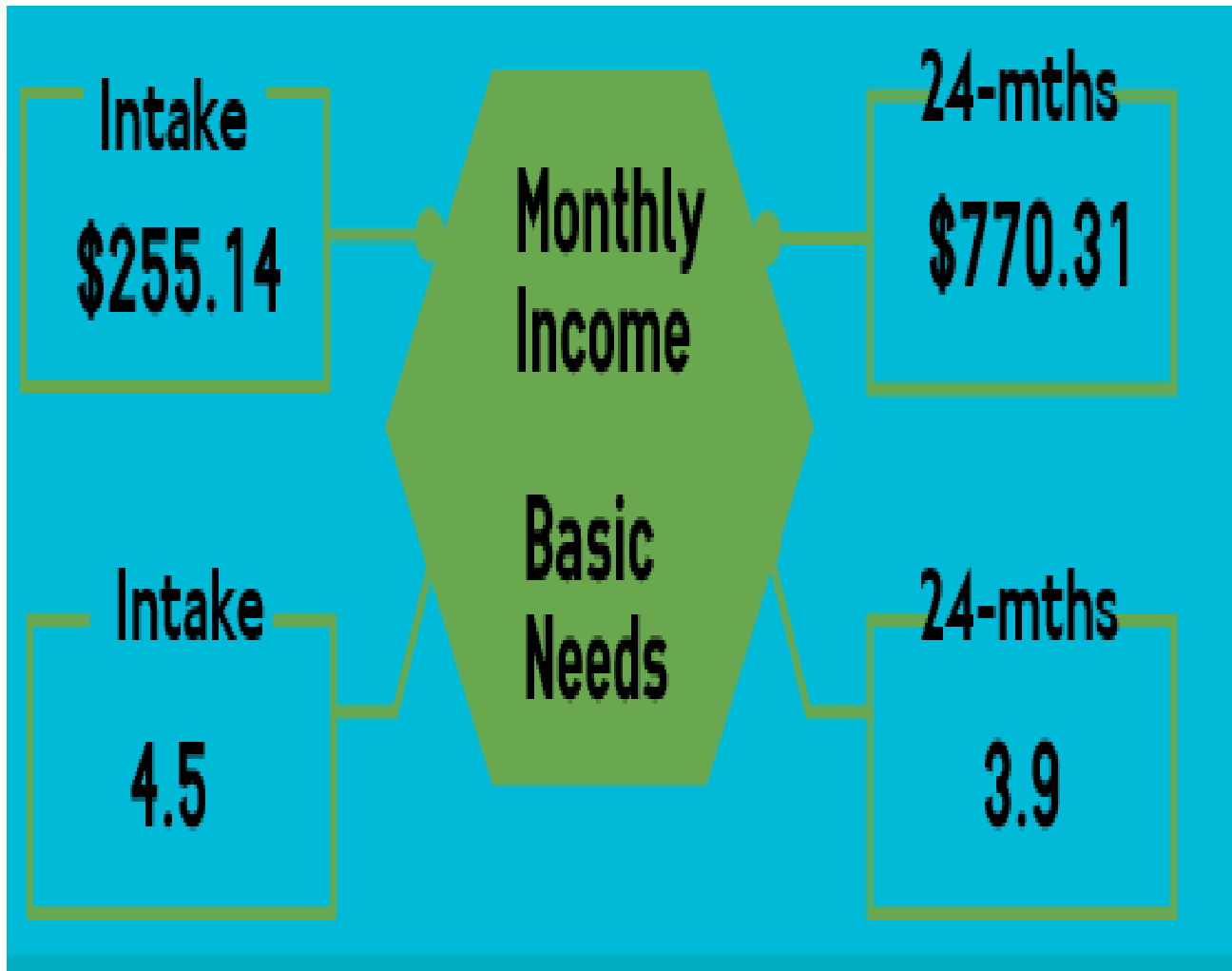
**COLONIZATION / DISCRIMINATION**



**WELFARE STATE / SOCIAL  
SERVICE SECTOR**



POVERTY / INCOME INEQUALITY



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I think we would like more supports for kids to finish school...kids can access student financing but there's really rigid rules about that...and the kids we serve aren't going to go to school for eight hours a day, and that's one of the requirements for funding.

- Staff member





AFFORDABLE HOUSING

## Affordability & Availability

**Average Income  
at 24 months  
= < \$800**

**Average Market Rent  
Studio = \$700-1,099  
1-bedroom =  
\$850-1,300**

- 15,000-18,000 in extreme housing need (50% of income)
- Deficit growing about 1,000 units per year (CHF, 2015)

**Loss of Rental Units  
gentrification / condo conversion**

**Indigenous housing  
On / off reserve**

” It's hard to get housing, it's not the program's fault...a lot of places once they hear a program is subsidizing part of your rent and you're on social assistance, and oh you've got a pet! They never call you.

- Youth participant



COLONIZATION / DISCRIMINATION

## Indigenous Youth n = 10



- Percentage of time housed = 38% (73% general sample)

- Rehoused the most times or not housed at all

- Less time in employment training and education

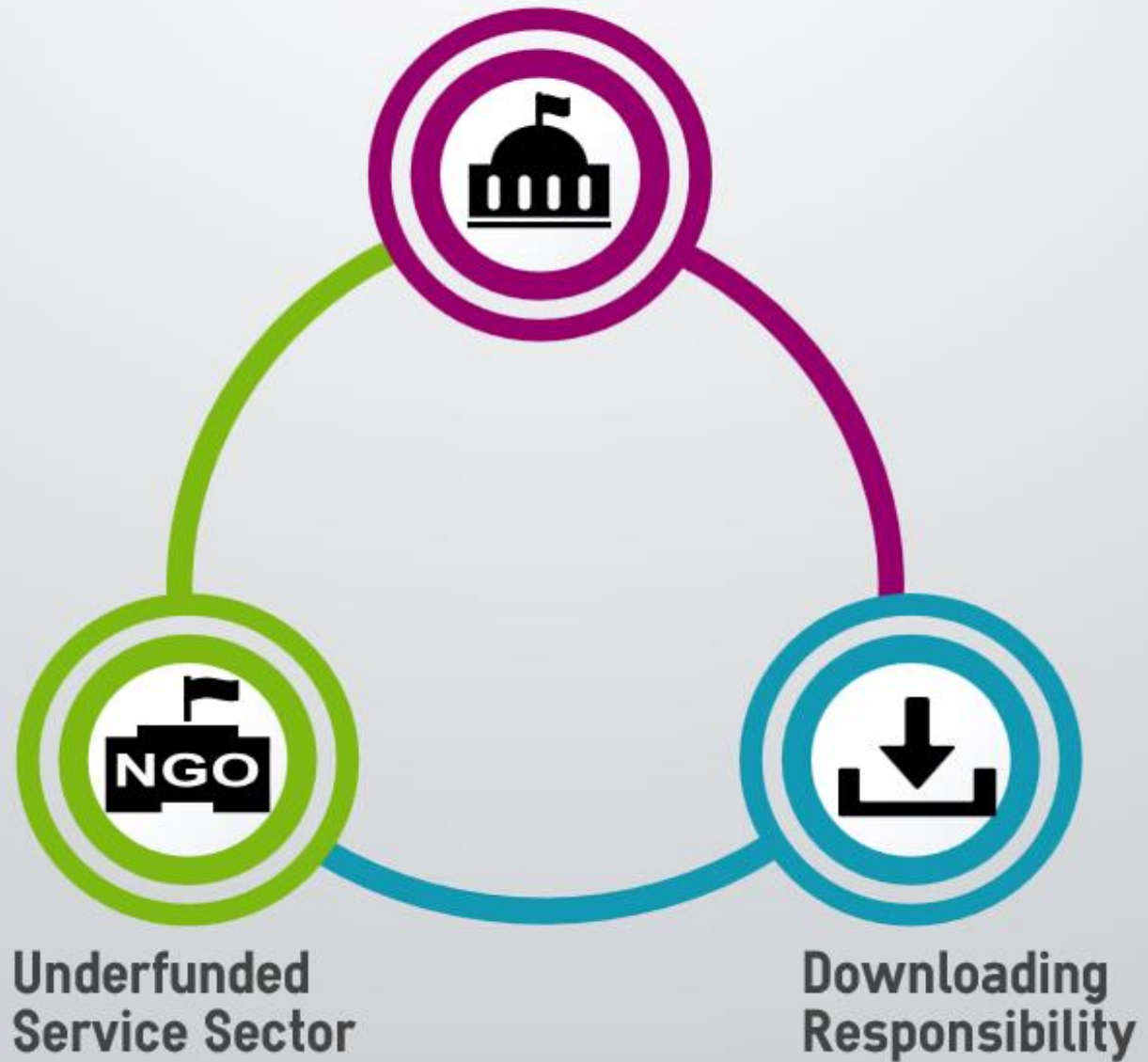
- Low to no income

- High incidence of mental health concerns and substance use



**WELFARE STATE / SOCIAL  
SERVICE SECTOR**

## Inadequate Welfare State



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Mental health is a big one. I think addictions can be frustrating, but I have more hope when the kids' issues are addiction. Mental health I have no hope...It's usually just they get prescribed medication and that's it. They have a hard time accessing counselling and seeing psychiatrists and getting help for a free or reduced price

*Staff member, HF program for youth*



” They [Alberta Works] cut me off. It wasn't big money...like \$600. But I could survive a little bit. And then they cut me off and it was hard with my renting and my food...my school is going to be full-time, and it's scary

- Youth participant



POVERTY / INCOME INEQUALITY

COLONIZATION / DISCRIMINATION

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

WELFARE STATE / SOCIAL SERVICE SECTOR



# Causes of youth homelessness

- Family conflict / abuse
- Breakdown of systems e.g. child welfare, correction

# Thank you!

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