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# Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness

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# Part 1

## Canadian Definition of Homelessness



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# Why?

## **A common Canadian Definition of Homelessness allows us to:**

- **Share a common language about homelessness**
- **More easily enumerate the problem**
- **Evaluate outcomes and progress**
- **Coordinate responses to homelessness**
- **Develop stronger policy responses**



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# Developing the Definition

**A good definition must be:**

- **Inclusive and Comprehensive**
- **Meaningful**
- **Clear**
- **Practical and Useable**
- **Canadian**



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# Canadian Definition Of Homelessness

## DEFINITION

Homelessness describes 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.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations organized here in a **typology** that includes 1) **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure,



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# Housing and Shelter Circumstances

OPERATIONAL CATEGORY		LIVING SITUATION
1	Unsheltered	1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract
		1.2 People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation
2	Emergency Sheltered	2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless
		2.2 Violence-Against-Women (VAW) shelters
		2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods etc.
3	Provisionally Accommodated	3.1 Interim Housing for people who are homeless
		3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing.
		3.3 People accessing short term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure
		3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements.
		3.5 Accommodation / Reception centres for recently arrived immigrants and refugees
4	At Risk of Homelessness	4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness
		4.2 Individuals and families who are precariously housed.



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# Addressing the needs of sub-populations

- **Aboriginal people**
- **Youth**
- **Families**
- **Etc.**



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# Part 2

## Definition of *Youth* Homelessness



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# What we did:

- a) Conducted an extensive *literature review* of definitions of homelessness in Canada and abroad
- b) Assembled a stakeholder working group with the *National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness* to craft the definition
- c) Consulted young people with lived experience
- d) Consulted with other key stakeholders



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# What is covered

- Definition
- Why a separate definition?
- Differences within the youth population
- Typology of homelessness and housing insecurity
- Pathways into homelessness
- Conditions of youth homelessness
- Youth Homelessness from a Human Rights perspective



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# A good definition of youth homelessness will:

- Help ensure young people get better services based on their needs
- Support community focus on the needs of young people
- Avoid jurisdictional disputes over who is responsible for supporting young people



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# Canadian Definition Of Youth Homelessness

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## **DEFINITION**

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**“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.**



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# Canadian Definition Of Youth Homelessness

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Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward in their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people experiencing homelessness lack personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful.

Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.



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**WHY** do we  
need a definition  
of *YOUTH*  
homelessness?



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# Age Matters!

- Lack of experience living independently
- May not have necessary skills and experience
- Adolescent Development
- Young people seek and use services differently
- Young people need age appropriate services
- Institutional and jurisdictional service differences based on age



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# Diversity!



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# Key differences within the youth population

- Differences within the youth population
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Ethno-racial background
- Indigenous youth



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# The Typology of Youth Homelessness

- 1) “**Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
- 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
- 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally,
- 4) **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 Observatory on Homelessness, 2012:1)

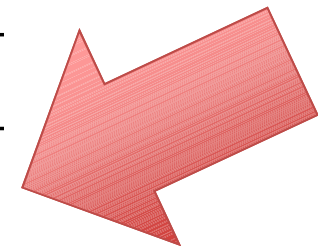


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# The Typology of Youth Homelessness

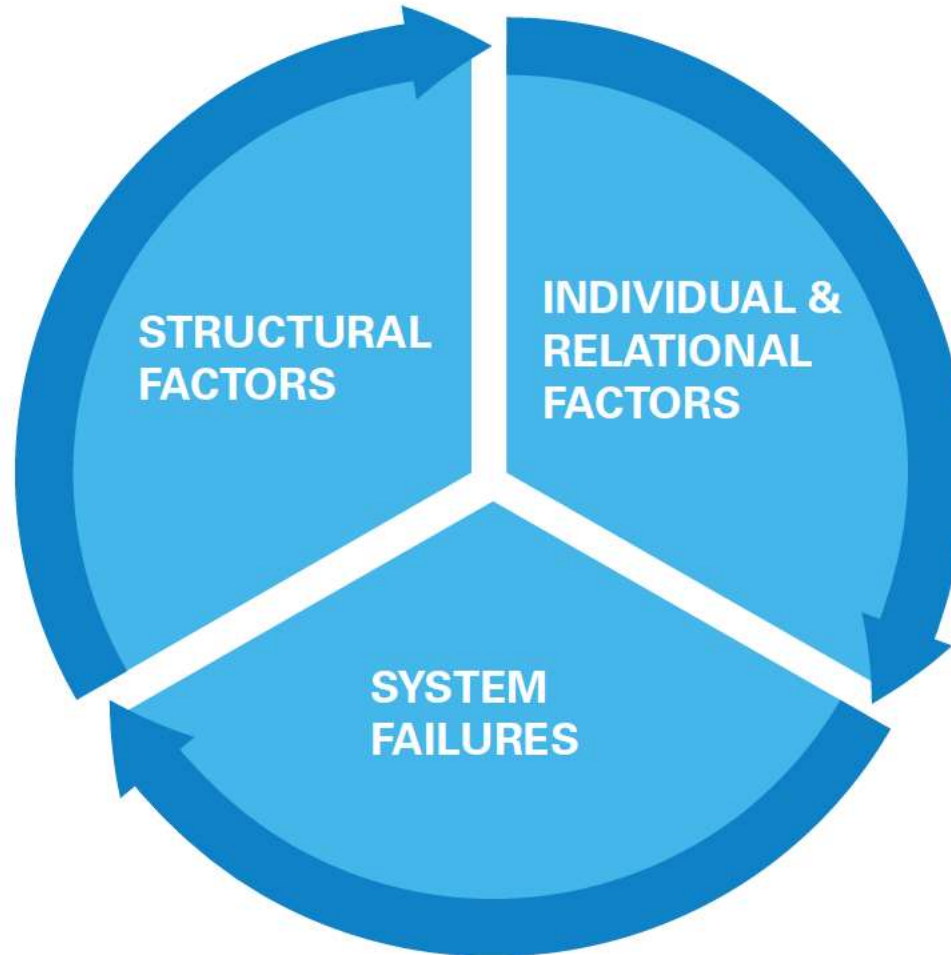
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# Pathways into homelessness



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# Conditions of youth homelessness



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# When we let young people remain homeless ...

- **Health worsens**
  - **Mental health challenges**
    - **Potential for exploitation**
    - **Greater risk of addictions**
    - **Involvement with the law**
      - **Dropping out of school**
      - **Trauma and criminal victimization**
  - **Entrenchment on the streets**



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# Youth Homelessness from a **Human Rights** perspective



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# A Human Rights perspective

While all human rights apply to youth the list below represents the most relevant. THE RIGHT TO:

ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

ADEQUATE HOUSING

ADEQUATE FOOD

EDUCATION

PERSONAL SECURITY & PRIVACY

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ASSEMBLY

HEALTH

WORK

LIFE



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**Questions or  
comments?**

