DISCERNING 'FUNCTIONAL ZERO'

ALINA TURNER

PhD, School of Public Policy,
University of Calgary

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY | THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

COH — Canadian Observatory on Homelessness — the homeless hub

Abt ASSOCIATES

CAEH — Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

CAEH 2016, London, Ontario

Key Points

- Efforts underway internationally to create **consistent definition** and measure ending homelessness.

- Currently **no consensus** in Canada on an approach to measuring an end to homelessness.

- US (USICH, HUD, VA) and Canada (COH, CAEH) colleagues beginning conversations on a **common conceptual framework** for defining an end to homelessness.

- Working Paper launched to help shape our **national direction** and next steps.

- **Consultations** with Lived Experience, communities, gov't over past year to revise proposed approach.

- **Revisions on FZ** definitions & next steps.

Why does a common definition matter?

*What gets measured **gets done***.

*What gets measured and fed back **gets done well***.

*What gets rewarded **gets repeated***.

- Articulates what the system aims to achieve.

- Drives continuous quality & performance.

- Informs investment decisions, system gap analysis, policy change.

- Promotes service integration across systems.

- **Articulates the values we apply to this work.**

Why does a common definition matter?

- Demonstrate progress in a way that **resonates** with public, service participants, decision-makers, service sector.

- Helps address concern and **skepticism** about "what it really means to end homelessness"

New Orleans ended veteran homelessness. Let's do it across America
Mitch Landrieu

Ours was the first city in the US to get all veterans off the streets. But there is still much work to do against homelessness across the community and country
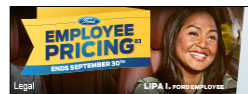
Homelessness in America affects a large proportion of US veterans. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

On any given night, 50,000 of our nation's veterans are without a safe place to sleep. As First Lady Michelle Obama said: "When a Veteran comes home kissing the ground, it is unacceptable that he should ever have to sleep on it."

STARS AND STRIP

Home | News | Sports | Travel | Military Life | Opini
Blogs | Multimedia | Store | Weather | Site Map | En

EMPLOYEE PRICING
ENDS SEPTEMBER 30TH
Legal | LIPA I. FORD EMPLOYEE

Home / News / Veterans

Connecticut ended chronic hom
veterans, officials say

By Dave Collins
Associated Press
Published: August 27, 2015

f Share   Tweet   reddit

NEWINGTON, Conn. — The federal government has declared Connecticut the first state in the country to end chronic homelessness among veterans, officials announced Thursday.

The declaration means that all known veterans experiencing chronic homelessness in the state either have housing or are on an immediate path to permanent housing, officials said. Chronic homelessness is defined as being homeless for at least one year or being homeless at least four times

Thursday May 14, 2015

Medicine Hat becomes the first city in Canada to eliminate homelessness

f t reddit g+ +

A homeless woman lies on a sidewalk in Vancouver, B.C. (Andy Clark/Reuters)

Listen 6:35

MORE STORIES FROM THIS EPISODE
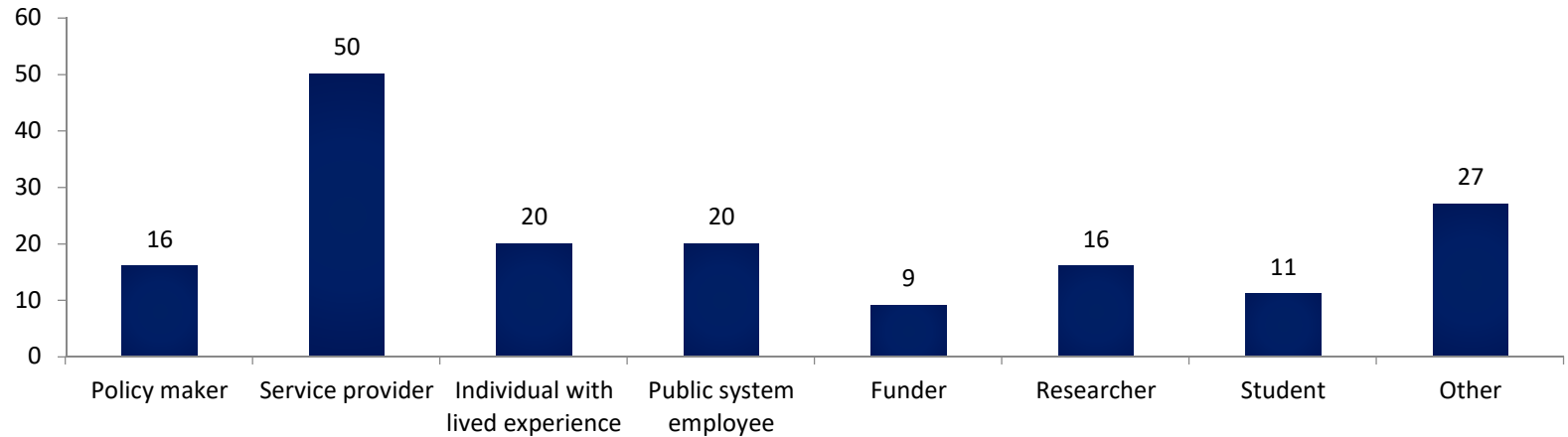
0:00 / 1:38

Consultation Feedback

General Survey = 116 responses.

Lived Experience Survey = 42 responses

Town Halls = 43 participants

Written Responses (Wellington Youth Focus Group, Gov't of Ontario)

Survey Responses (n=116)

Category	Value
Policy maker	16
Service provider	50
Individual with lived experience	20
Public system employee	20
Funder	9
Researcher	16
Student	11
Other	27

Consultation Key Themes

General support for FZ definition, with notable tensions around implementation, ethical dilemmas, boundaries & accountability.
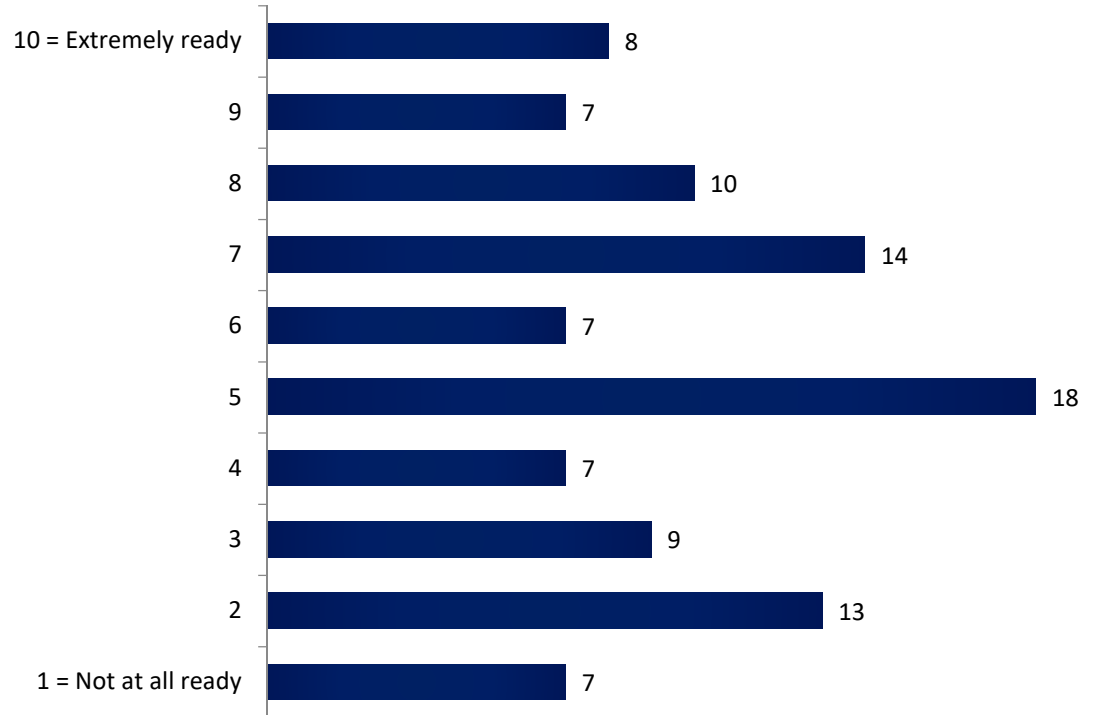
- **Reframing how we present Functional Zero:** Tension from lived experience and some survey respondents re: selling short with FZ when we should be working towards Absolute Zero.

- **Clarifying accountability** for achieving aspects of Functional Zero: concern that service providers/CE can't change systems, thus can't be held accountable to Systems measures.

- **Support for implementation**: levels of readiness to implement FZ varied and concern for support on interpreting locally was expressed.

- **Boundaries of the definition**: some felt we shouldn't include Lived Experience voice as a dimension and only look at LoS in shelter and moves into housing (supply/demand); others strongly supported lived experience perspective.

- **Population Focus**: Some felt we should limit to absolute/chronic while others thought it should include at risk/hidden populations.

- **Local flexibility**: general support for guidance on criteria, but strong push for flexibility in local implementation given priorities and contexts differ greatly nationally.

"Because I worry that it takes pressure off of us to achieve absolute zero homelessness with all of its complexities. When we think of what systems do to end homelessness for individuals and families, "Functional Zero" might describe the best that a community has to offer. However, when I think of homeless people I've met, I don't believe that coming up with a 'backup' definition is a moral or ethical way of measuring the end of homelessness. If we can't provide hope that an absolute end is possible across Canada, then how can we maintain hope within our programs, and when we are talking to clients and patients who need it?"

Survey Participant

Implementation Readiness

The table shows how ready respondents felt that their community was to adapt the Functional Zero definition.

Readiness	Count
10 = Extremely ready	8
9	7
8	10
7	14
6	7
5	18
4	7
3	9
2	13
1 = Not at all ready	7

"Potentially host an event that can bring together the homeless-serving sector in Toronto to walk through what functional zero means for the city and the non-profit sector. Go through the measurements/ baselines/standards and talk about the transition to a city where emergency services are no longer the primary response to homelessness.

Provide materials, tools and resources to people, including a guide for how to strive toward functional zero as a shelter/non-profit/community."

Survey Participant

Proposed Key Dimensions of Absolute/Functional Zero

Absolute/Functional Zero Short Definitions

FUNCTIONAL ZERO	ABSOLUTE ZERO	Dimensions
Functional Zero end to homelessness means that communities have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.	Absolute Zero refers to a true end to homelessness, where everyone has access to supports and housing so that no-one becomes homeless in the first place.	1. **Lived Experience** 2. **Homeless-Serving System** 3. **Public Systems**

Rather than opposite concepts, Functional Zero describes progress towards Absolute Zero end to homelessness.

Functional Zero Indicators	Absolute Zero Indicators	Verification Sources
Indicators of Progress towards Outcome	Indicators of Outcome Achievement	Examples.
Total number of unsheltered persons and emergency sheltered is consistently decreasing year-over-year towards 0.	The total number of homeless persons will be zero at any point-in-time.	System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, program/system evaluations)
Length of stay in emergency shelter/unsheltered is less than 10 days for anyone during course of the year. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.		System of care site visits
Number moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to number entering homeless-serving system any given month. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.	All persons experiencing housing instability have ready access to the right housing and supports they need in major life areas (housing, life skills, family conflict, violence, social networks and relationships, drug and alcohol use, physical health, emotional and mental health), so that they do not experience housing instability in the first place.	Stakeholder consultations
All unsheltered persons in a community are engaged with services and have been offered low-barrier shelter and housing at least every two weeks. This performance is improved/maintained year-over-year.		Service standards assessments

Moving Forward

- Include a short definition.

- Refine for Indigenous communities.

- Develop communication material for general public, visuals, etc.

- Outline data sources for criteria – Develop a Data Framework for implementation – this should be tailored for government vs. communities.

- Develop consistent data collection tools to support definition (ie. client surveys, system analysis templates, etc.)

- Tweak criteria/benchmarks to allow for flexible local implementation.

- Continue knowledge dissemination to support endorsement and implementation in community – talks, community workshops, etc.

- Seek endorsement from communities/gov't to align work nationally.

- Translate into French.

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

homelesshub.ca

thehub@edu.yorku.ca
homelesshub.ca
facebook.com/homelesshub
@homelesshub

ALINA TURNER, PhD
T: 403-827-8722
E: turneralina@gmail.com
W: TurnerResearchandStrategyInc.com
http://www.policyschool.ucalgary.ca/