United Way
Bruce Grey

BRUCE GREY
POVERTY
TASK FORCE
Our Voice is Power

WHY THIS TOOLKIT WAS CREATED

Homelessness is an increasing public concern for communities across Canada. This is reflected in increasing news and media coverage in recent years.

People experiencing homelessness face stigma and discrimination on the basis of their housing status. Sometimes, this is reflected in coverage on homelessness.

By empowering media with facts and guidelines for reporting on homelessness, human rights can be better protected, and the public interest can be better served.

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognizes housing as a human right:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** and medical care and necessary social services"

In Canada, the right to housing became law with the passage of the *National Housing Strategy Act* in June 2019.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, a State is violating international human rights law if any significant part of its population is deprived of access to basic shelter or housing.

People experiencing homelessness should be recognized and supported as rights claimants, rather than portrayed as criminals or stereotypes.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Each person has a unique story to tell. In that sense, there are as many causes of homelessness as there are people experiencing it.

In general, the most common causes for a person's first experience of homelessness are:

- Family or relationship breakdown
- Disabilities, including mental health and substance use disorders
- Evictions and poverty

Most individuals who experience homelessness find themselves without a home for the first time as youth, between the ages of 18-20 years old.

HOPE
END HOMELESSNESS
WINNIPEG

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DO:

- **Use Person-First language:** e.g., "people experiencing homelessness" or "person living without a home"

- **Separate the Issues:** homelessness, substance use, panhandling and other issues are distinct and often unrelated situations people experience

- **Identify Strengths:** people experiencing homelessness are resourceful and collaborative, and are the experts on homelessness

- **Include the Voices of those with Lived and Living Experience:** include the first-hand experience of those without a home, rather than relying only on government or academic voices

- **Look at the System:** contextualize individuals' experiences and stories within the colonizing and social systems that impact their lives

  Identify Solutions: highlight measures that can prevent and end homelessness, such as affordable housing, supports for families, accessibility, or mental health and harm reduction services

DON'T:

- **Do not define people by their circumstances:** e.g., "homeless person" or "the homeless"

- **Do not Stigmatize People:** Do not label people who are coping with a violation of their basic right to housing as "addicts" or "criminals"

- **Do Not Focus on Vulnerabilities:** describing people as "vulnerable" or "at risk" can be paternalistic and condescending. When needed, identify specific risks or harms people face

- **Do not Tokenize or Sensationalize those with Lived and Living Experience:** do not interview individuals who are in a state of crisis or intoxication, or share sensitive personal details

- **Do Not Blame the Individual:** focusing on a person's choices or mistakes does not offer insight into the limited range of options society may have presented them with

- **Do Not Portray Homelessness as Inevitable:** homelessness has very specific social and economic causes and is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. Do not suggest that homelessness "has always existed" or is too complex to solve.
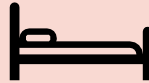
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TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Unsheltered: Sleeping outside, in tents, bus shelters, cars, doorways or empty buildings. 5-15% of homelessness

Emergency Sheltered: Staying in emergency shelters for adults, youth or family violence. 10-30% of homelessness

Provisionally Accommodated: Staying in transitional housing, hotels, motels, hostels, jails, hospitals, or "couch surfing" with family or friends, without any long-term agreement or plan. 60-80% of homelessness

At Risk: Living in housing that is too expensive, crowded or unsafe. 3-20X the total number of those experiencing homelessness

Many people experience
multiple types of homelessness

WHO SHOULD BE CALLED?

If you see someone who is:

- Experiencing a mental health or medical (non-emergency) crisis
- Intoxicated or otherwise impaired
- Requiring transport to appropriate services (i.e. a shelter)
- Sleeping in an unsafe space and/or inappropriately dressed for the weather
- Requiring social services (i.e. housing, nutrition, health or community supports)
- Likely to come to harm without intervention

AND the individual is not posing an immediate harm to themselves or others, call 2-1-1

Callers will be provided with either a community referral, crisis intervention support, connected to 911 or offered a follow up

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

Colonizing systems have been imposed on Indigenous peoples' relationships to land and housing. In Canada, reserve and scrip systems, forced migrations, residential schools, Sixties Scoop and CFS policies have led to Indigenous peoples' experiences of homelessness.

Jesse Thistle's *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* identifies it as the outcome of historical and ongoing settler colonization and racism, that has displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories.

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UTILIZING PHOTOGRAPHS, VOICES & STORYTELLING

Personal stories told by people with lived/living experience of poverty can serve as powerful tools in raising awareness of poverty and in challenging stereotypes.

It is important that individuals with lived/living experience are able to choose when and under which circumstances, if any, they choose to share personal information.

10-Engaging People With Lived/Living Experience of Poverty

Poverty porn can be described as "any type of media, be it written, photographed or filmed, which exploits the poor's condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers or increasing charitable donations or support for a given cause."

Privacy is important, and **written** consent should be obtained prior to posting photos of people and especially children. It is important to keep in mind that children cannot properly give informed consent, as there isn't a full understanding where these photos will be posted and who will see them.

Even when asking for consent be aware that the power and privilege, as storytellers, gives power to make such a request, and this can create a power imbalance, and people can feel obligated an/or exploited.

I have been working in this field for over five years and also was previously homeless a couple of times in my life and I can say not every homeless person struggles with addiction. There are so many other factors involved than just addiction and substance use. A lot of it includes financials, trauma, health and current government laws and operations that lead to someone becoming homeless.

Jacob Morris-Wheeler, CYW, Owen Sound

Additional Resources and Information:

Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada
https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness

Canadian Definition Of Homelessness
https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf

National Housing Strategy Act
https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-11.2/FullText.html

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

Rural homelessness: how the structural and social context of small-town living influences the experience of homelessness
https://link.springer.com/article/10.17269/s41997-022-00625-9

Ethics of posting photos of poverty
https://blog.insightglobaleducation.com/the-ethics-of-posting-photos-of-poverty

Tips for photojournalists covering poverty
https://coveringpoverty.uga.edu/2021/04/28/7-tips-for-photojournalists-covering-poverty/

Local Housing and Homelessness Plans

Bruce County: https://www.brucecounty.on.ca/housing-homelessness-planning

Grey County: https://www.grey.ca/government/strategic-planning-and-studies/housing-and-homelessness-plan

M'Wikwedong Indigenous Supportive Housing: https://mwikwedong.com/program/giiwe/

Home Takeover Pilot Project: https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Your-Environment/Healthy-Housing/Home-Takeover

RentSafe: https://rentsafe.ca/owen-sound/

Grey Bruce Community Foundation Vital Conversations on Housing:
https://www.communityfoundationgreybruce.com/post/?ID=280

For more information please contact United Way Francesca Dobbyn execdir@unitedwaybg.com or Jill Umbach Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force povertytaskforce@unitedwaybg.com or 519-376-1560