POVERTY REDUCTION & HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

A Snapshot

Factors that lead to homelessness and poverty are structural and complex. They can be tied to multiple factors: physical or mental health challenges; experiences of violence or abuse; barriers to education, employment, or income; limited affordable housing options; and/or systemic racism.

FCSS
Family & Community
Support Services

Edmonton

In 2019, 12.9% of the Edmonton population was living in poverty. [1]
That's more than 1 in 10 people.

STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

Opportunities for financial empowerment can improve outcomes for people with low incomes. Income stability can lead to participation in leisure and recreation activities, reducing risks of isolation and strengthening social networks.

Prevention programming for individuals at risk of poverty and homelessness should focus on the "whole person," rather than short-term outcomes. [2] That way, programming can have far-reaching impacts for health, housing, education, and employment.

ADULTS

- 61% of people who experienced housing instability in 2020 were Indigenous [3], though they represent only 6% of the overall population.

- People with low literacy skills are at risk of living in poverty. [6]

Estimates say

53%

of people experiencing homelessness in Edmonton are women, [5] though this number is likely much higher (see "Hidden Homelessness").

WHAT IS HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS?

Women and gender-diverse people face poverty at higher rates than men, but it's not as obvious—they are more likely to couch surf, avoid shelters, and live in precarious housing situations.
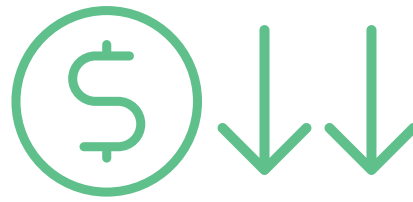
In one study, the most common factors that led women to homelessness were:
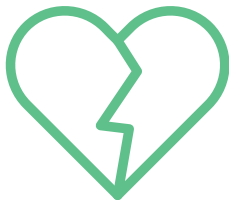
A breakup   *An eviction*   *The inability to afford housing [4]*

PREVENTION EFFORTS

- Programming to empower women and LGBTQ2S+ individuals can help, but addressing shelter and housing policies and practices is also necessary in meeting the needs of these populations.

- Financial empowerment programming can be integrated into other support programs and services, [7] working with individuals to reach financial stability and security through coaching, education, and more. [8]

- Eviction prevention can help reduce the number of people who are at risk of homelessness. Different strategies can include short-term or temporary loans to tenants for rent or utility bills debt, legal clinics or credit counselling, or supports to understand eviction procedures and tenant rights. [9]

DID YOU KNOW?

Effective programs and services should be developed in partnership with participants—offering choice, building on individual strengths, ensuring flexibility, and embedding peer-based programming.

YOUTH

- Child poverty rates in Edmonton have been trending down—in 2019, 15.5% of youth aged 0—17 lived in poverty. [10]

- In 2000, that number was 22.7%. [10]

Approximately

24%

of people experiencing homelessness in the city are between the ages of 0 and 24. [3]

LGBTQ2S+ Youth face increased risk of exploitation, mental health challenges, substance use, risky behaviour, and suicide. [13] Factors leading to homelessness and poverty for these youth may overlap and are often connected to discrimination or the breakdown of personal relationships. [14]

Shelters and services that are safe, and have trained staff, or staff who identify as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community, are better able to understand their unique needs and circumstances. [15]

Indigenous Youth become homeless at a younger age and have more mental health symptoms, higher substance use/dependency issues, and higher victimization and suicide attempt rates than their non–Indigenous peers—all while experiencing precarious living situations. [16]

Research shows the importance of connecting Indigenous youth with their culture at a young age, as a means to prevent poverty, mental health concerns, addiction, homelessness, or experiences of abuse in later life. [17] Programming should be based in culture and led by Indigenous communities. [16]

THE EDUCATION CONNECTION

High school completion rates are an important indicator tied to risk factors for youth poverty and homelessness. Schools are critical locations for prevention and early intervention strategies and can work closely with community groups to establish youth support hubs. [12]

3–year high school completion rates:

Edmonton Public Schools

57.0% to 76.4%
(2000—2001)   (2018—2019)

Edmonton Catholic Schools

59.7% to 86.5%
(2000—2001)   (2018—2019)

DID YOU KNOW?

Access to prevention strategies can have a major impact on youth outcomes around homelessness and poverty.

COVID-19

- Since 2013, the number of people served by food banks in Edmonton has increased, heightened by economic instability during the pandemic. [18]

- Faced with financial instability, thousands of individuals and families in Edmonton relied on food hamper programs in the first part of the pandemic.

Data shows racialized people were nearly

2x

more likely to report barriers to paying rent during the pandemic. [19]

EQUITY, POVERTY REDUCTION & HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The unique circumstances faced by marginalized groups who are experiencing poverty and homelessness require a more holistic system that incorporates culture, friends and family (chosen, kinship, or immediate) that can act as a protective network to adverse events throughout life. Preventive programming will help to lower the rate of inequity in the future and empower people and communities.

STRATEGIC STEPS:

Addressing financial instability and focusing on strategies to remain housed are essential to improving outcomes for individuals and families at risk of poverty or homelessness. Solutions ultimately rely on collaboration and government action, but preventive measures to reduce risk factors are invaluable to long term outcomes.

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