



## Introduction

Prevention makes sense. To prevent disease, we vaccinate. To prevent traffic deaths, we install seat belts. While we recognize intuitively that preventing homelessness is a good idea, there has been little movement in Canada to make that happen on a national scale.

***A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention sets out to provide the language and clarity to begin that conversation.***

Since mass homelessness emerged in the mid-1980s, we have largely used emergency services to respond to people's immediate needs. While we will always need emergency services to help those in crisis, over time these short-term responses have become the standard method for managing homelessness long-term. In the last decade, Canadian policies and practices have begun to shift from managing homelessness to finding solutions, in particular the expansion



of the Housing First approach across the country. The Housing First model provides housing and supports for people experiencing chronic homelessness with no housing readiness requirements. New research, innovation, and best practices have propelled our thinking to make the goal of ending homelessness realistic; however, we are still missing an important piece – preventing homelessness in the first place. Why must we wait until people are entrenched in homelessness before offering help?



***In A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention, we set out to uncover what it will take to stop homelessness before it starts, to avoid its often-traumatizing effects.***

The aim of the framework is to begin a nation-wide conversation on what prevention looks like, and what it will take to shift toward homelessness prevention. Using international examples, the framework operationalizes the policies and practices necessary to successfully prevent homelessness and highlights who is responsible. Above all, it situates prevention within a human rights approach. Now is the time to prioritize homelessness prevention.

## Preventing homelessness is a human rights issue

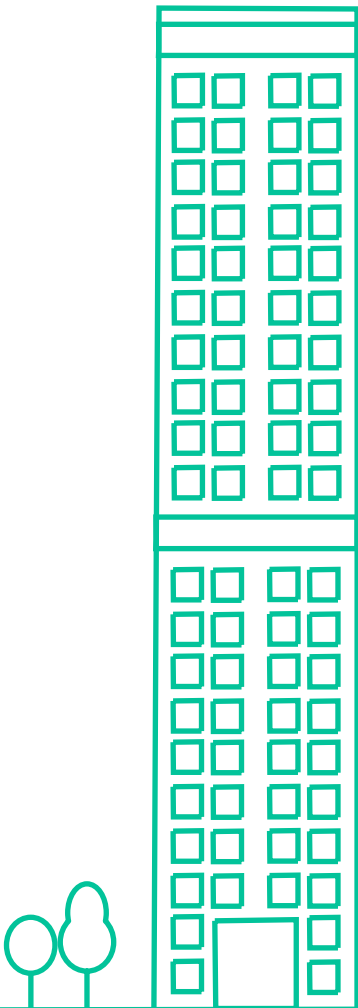
Homelessness occurs as a result of a combination of structural, systematic, and individual/relational factors. Addressing the multiple causes of homelessness through a coordinated effort will improve housing stability and reduce the risk of homelessness overall. Key populations are more vulnerable to structural inequality because of racism, sexism, colonialism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia; for this reason prevention strategies must adopt an intersectional lens and anti-oppressive approach that recognizes the impact of systemic discrimination on the risk of homelessness. This is why the framework is rooted in a human rights perspective.

Situating prevention within the human rights treaties and conventions to which Canada is a signatory, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, creates the obligation that prevention legislation, policy, practice, and intervention be developed with the understanding that all people “have a fundamental, legal right to be free of homelessness and to have access to adequate housing” (Canada Without Poverty et al., 2016, p. 7). In fact, results from our national homelessness prevention survey indicated that over 96% of respondents agreed that affordable, adequate, and safe housing is a human right.




## Evidence for homelessness prevention

Canada has been slow to take on homelessness prevention. There are some valuable local initiatives, but they have not been broadly applied. However, there are excellent examples around the globe of successful, systematic homelessness prevention. Research coming out of Germany, the UK, and Australia for example, point to the economic and social benefits of shifting to prevention. For example, Australia has had a prevention-focused response to youth homelessness since the 1990s. On the other hand, reluctance to embrace homelessness prevention in Canada is due in part to the ‘politics of scarcity’ that suggests investment in prevention will divert resources from existing homelessness programs. In fact, because prevention relies on multiple sectors that sit outside of the homelessness sector to work properly, this is not the case. Housing, social services, health, and employment sectors all have a role to play in preventing homelessness. The Welsh government implemented legislation to reflect these partnerships, outlining the different parts of government involved in prevention. Preventing homelessness cannot and should not be the sole responsibility of the homelessness sector.



Some of the resistance to prevention comes from the conceptual and methodological struggles of how prevention works. For instance, while there is consensus among homelessness prevention scholars that prevention efforts must be made at the structural, institutional, and individual levels, the majority of the research to date focuses on individual interventions to support people at imminent risk of homelessness (Burt et al., 2005; Crane et al., 2004, 2006; Jahiel, 1992; Mackie, 2015; Maher & Allen, 2014; Shinn & Baumohl, 1999; Shinn et al., 2001). While these programs are essential, focusing solely on individual and relational factors fails to address prevention at the structural and systematic levels, thereby missing the opportunity to prevent homelessness more broadly.

A key concern in the prevention literature is how to predict whether an individual or family would have become homeless were it not for a particular prevention intervention. In many ways, homelessness is unpredictable given the complexity of factors that cause homelessness, and the risks and assets of specific situations. For example, most people who receive evictions notices do not become homeless, but those who do become homeless often share strikingly similar characteristics with those who avoid homelessness. However, other areas where prediction challenges exist, such as preventing school drop-out or crime prevention, continue to invest in prevention efforts. As Dr. Bernie Pauly suggests:

 I would suggest we need to shift our thinking in homelessness from the problem of predicting to one of recognizing that certain conditions are necessary to prevent homelessness. This would lead us to focus on and ensure that structural factors are in place as part of primary prevention and identifying those at risk for secondary prevention due to structural and systemic conditions (e.g., paying more than 30% of their income on rent, job loss, trauma, family conflict, violence and so on) (DR. BERNIE PAULY, UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, PERSONAL COMMUNICATION, 2017).

Homelessness prevention should be measured on its ability to adequately assess and improve the conditions that lead to homelessness, rather than focusing on which vulnerable people will become homeless without intervention.

The international evidence reveals that homelessness prevention makes sense from social and economic perspectives (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 1998; CMHC, 2005; Culhane et al., 2011; Distasio & McCullough, 2014; Lindblom, 1991; Mackie, 2015; Pleace & Culhane, 2016). Evaluations of

prevention initiatives in Germany, England, and the UK demonstrated that prevention contributed to the reduction of homelessness. A range of prevention interventions, from evictions prevention, support for survivors of intimate partner violence, to landlord mediation, all showed success (Fitzpatrick and Busch-Geertsema, 2008; Pawson et al., 2007). In Canada, research on the importance of discharge planning from correctional facilities, hospitals, and shelters provides evidence that prevention efforts can and will be successful in the Canadian context (Backer & Howard, 2007; Forchuk et al., 2008; John Howard Society of Ontario et al., 2016; Susser et al., 1997; Thomson, 2014). Research continues to inform emerging practices to support key populations including, youth, veterans, families, and those with high-needs such as addictions and/or mental health challenges (Barrett et al., 2010; Cunningham et al., 2007; Doherty & Stuttaford, 2007; Gaetz, 2013, 2014; Letiecq et al., 1998; Shinn et al., 2013; Stefancic & Tsemberis, 2007). While there continue to be gaps in the knowledge on homelessness prevention, particularly as it relates to evaluation and measuring outcomes, the evidence is mounting that it is effective and worth investing in.

Investing in prevention must include targeting the structural drivers of homelessness, which will require collaboration across multiple sectors. In this way, prevention acts as a ‘fusion policy’ issue, whereby higher levels of government must coordinate legislative, policy, and funding frameworks across sectors.

**Homelessness cannot be prevented by the homelessness sector alone; ministries and departments in health, education, child protection, criminal justice, housing, employment and training, etc. have a role to play.**

With the support of all levels of government, relevant community-based service providers both inside and outside the homelessness sector can implement a systems integration model that coordinates prevention interventions and data sharing across sectors. Unloading the burden of preventing homelessness as the sole responsibility of the homelessness sector challenges the ‘politics of scarcity’ that suggests engaging in prevention work will draw resources and funding away from the supports being provided to those who are already experiencing homelessness. On the contrary, by recognizing prevention as a fusion policy issue, investments made towards prevention in one sector will positively impact other sectors. Indeed, our survey results indicate that stakeholders across sectors are ready for change, with over 98% of respondents agreeing that policy, investment, and programs devoted to homelessness prevention should be a bigger priority.

# Definition of the Prevention of Homelessness

Through a scan of available prevention research, in dialogue with key stakeholders, and consultation through the prevention survey, we have created a working definition of homelessness prevention that provides the language and clarity to begin a national conversation on a shift towards prevention.

## **Definition of the Prevention of Homelessness**

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.

The causes of homelessness include individual and relational factors, broader population-based structural factors, and the failure of many public institutions to protect people from homelessness. This suggests that homelessness prevention must not only include interventions targeted at individuals, but broader structural reforms directed at addressing the drivers of homelessness. That not only communities but all orders of government, and most departments within have a responsibility to contribute to the prevention of homelessness is in keeping with a human rights perspective.

The definition and following typology suggest the nature and scope of homelessness prevention. Equally important is an assessment of what homelessness prevention is not. While certainly beneficial, emergency services that respond to immediate needs, such as providing food and shelter from the elements, cannot be described as homelessness prevention. Moreover, supports for people provided in an emergency context, such as life skills and addiction and mental health supports, do not constitute prevention if they are not offered within the context where people have immediate access to housing.

# Adapting the public health model

The framework is guided by and adapts the public health model of prevention, which has been used since the 1940s to reduce the risk and harms associated with illnesses. The public health model provides a range of prevention interventions that should take place simultaneously.

**Primary prevention** – Refers to structural-level initiatives that apply to everyone, in order to reduce the risk of homelessness and build protective factors. From a health perspective, primary prevention includes immunization programs or anti-smoking campaigns. The framework breaks down primary prevention further to describe an array of strategies that impact the population at large:

- **Universal prevention** – policies and interventions that target the broad public. While these strategies do not always have homelessness prevention as their goal, they have the effect of reducing the risks of becoming homeless by creating greater equality, which is vital to homelessness prevention. Examples include having an adequate supply of affordable housing and poverty reduction strategies, such as greater access to affordable child care.
- **Selected prevention** – prevention efforts aimed at members of a particular group, such as school-based programs and anti-oppression strategies for individuals facing discrimination, in particular Indigenous Peoples. It also includes programs aimed at low-income people, such as the basic income program currently being piloted in Ontario.
- **Indicated prevention** – applies to all those who are disadvantaged to ensure they do not become homeless in the first place. Examples of indicated prevention include support for families experiencing violence and individuals facing mental health and addictions challenges.



**Secondary prevention** – Those intervention strategies aimed at those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (i.e., received an eviction notice) as well as those who have recently become homeless, with the intention of avoiding homelessness or moving out of homelessness as quickly as possible. Secondary prevention includes a range of options from emergency financial assistance, family mediation, and domestic violence victim support, to name a few.

**Tertiary prevention** – Prevention initiatives that support individuals and families who have previously experienced homelessness to ensure that it doesn't happen again. The Housing First model is a type of tertiary prevention by providing chronically homeless individuals with housing and supports to maintain housing stability.

These classifications exist along a continuum. In order to effectively prevent homelessness, all three forms of prevention must occur simultaneously. Most of the prevention programs that exist in Canada and internationally fall into the secondary prevention category. While these interventions are crucial to support those in crisis, secondary interventions alone cannot prevent homelessness. Structural and systemic interventions that work at the level of primary prevention are needed to provide the policy, practice, and funding backbone for individual interventions to be successful.





# A typology of homelessness prevention

The typology described below outlines the various policies, practices, and interventions needed to prevent homelessness in Canada. Prevention requires an integrated systems approach, where each category works in union with one another. Moreover, each of the five categories has implications for primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. As described above, the classifications are not discreet; homelessness prevention requires an increased level of coordination between all levels of government, collaboration between systems and institutions, and cooperation at the community level, especially as it relates to data management and information sharing. The typology is as follows:



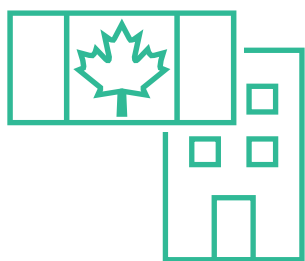
## STRUCTURAL PREVENTION

Structural prevention addresses factors that leave people at risk of homelessness, through legislation, policy, and investment. Its goal is to enhance social inclusion and housing stability. Structural prevention targets universal, selected, and indicated prevention, providing further evidence for the need of a systems integration approach. Universal prevention applies to the

population as a whole include poverty reduction strategies, such as raising the minimum wage and financial support for low-income earners. It also includes ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing, early childhood interventions, and violence prevention at the societal level. Anti-discrimination policies, practices, and training must be applied at the universal level to address the racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination that reduce an individual's ability to obtain adequate housing and access education and employment opportunities.

Selected-structural prevention targets the specific risk factors that certain groups experience. An example of selected-structural prevention is addressing the social, cultural, and economic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples, in particular taking up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* to engage in reparations for intergenerational trauma caused by historical and ongoing colonialism. Other examples include school-based programs to reduce youth homelessness and the high school drop-out rate, and support for individuals facing discrimination, such as racialized minorities and LGBTQ2S individuals.

Indicated prevention targets structural factors to include legislation, policy, and investments that provide the groundwork for supports for families facing interpersonal violence or individuals experiencing addiction and/or mental health challenges, for instance.



### Homelessness Prevention Legislation

Key to structural prevention is legislation that supports prevention efforts. Government legislation has four roles: 1) identify and address the drivers of homelessness; 2) set out government responsibilities, goals, and objectives; 3) provide the policy and funding for local communities; and 4) articulate how different government departments will work together.

There are successful examples of prevention legislation in the international community. Legislation coming out of Wales, Ireland and Britain, for example, stipulate that local authorities, supported by higher levels of government, have a duty to provide information and assistance to those who are at risk of homelessness. These pieces of legislation situate housing as a human right and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the state, public institutions, and local governments in preventing homelessness. The U.S. has prevention legislation to address youth and veteran homelessness specifically.



## SYSTEMS PREVENTION

Systems prevention looks to respond to institutional and systems failures that contribute to the risk of homelessness. Systems prevention works at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to ensure that people have access to the supports they need to prevent homelessness and its reoccurrence. Systems prevention has three components:

### 1) Fixing policy and procedural barriers to facilitate program

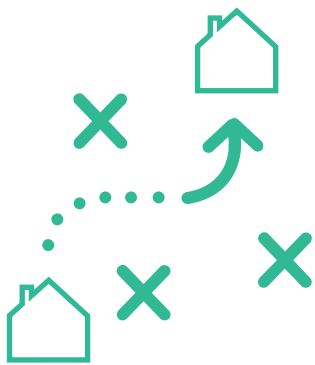
**access and support:** People face barriers to accessing benefits and supports because of specific rules and policies, such as the length of time individuals are able to use resources, like limits on transitional housing; benefit penalties when claimants do not follow strict program rules; and public housing policies that require people to move when their family composition changes.

### 2) Enhancing access to public systems, services, and appropriate

**supports:** People face a number of roadblocks to accessing the supports they need such as income support, social services, health/mental health care, and child and family support, for example. Barriers include, but are not limited to, a lack of knowledge about the services, linguistic and/or cultural barriers, disability, mobility/transportation issues, citizenship status, difficulty navigating systems, discrimination, age, and cost.

### 3) Reintegration supports: Facilitating effective transitions

**from public institutions or systems:** Transitions from publically funded institutions and systems, such as hospitals, corrections, and child protection are key points of vulnerability for homelessness. Reintegration supports are vital to ensuring that people aren't being discharged into homelessness. They offer resources to access and maintain housing stability prior to, and after, release. Three key areas require stronger reintegration supports: young people leaving child protection; transitional supports for people leaving corrections; and individuals leaving in-patient health and mental health settings.



## EARLY INTERVENTION

Early intervention consists of prevention policies and initiatives aimed at those at imminent risk of homelessness. Similarly, crisis intervention initiatives are for those who have recently experienced homeless.

From a human rights perspective, we have to act quickly for those at high risk of homelessness and not wait until they become entrenched in homelessness before intervening. A human rights approach also means we build supports and services for those at risk, rather than assume people will 'bootstrap' themselves out of homelessness. Early intervention includes a range of strategies:

- **Effective outreach, identification, and engagement** – makes sure people in need know that help is available and how to access it.
- **Coordinated intake and assessment** – a standardized approach to screening individuals and families to identify their immediate needs, their acuity, and what services they might require.
- **Client-centered case management and systems navigation** – informed by the individual or family's wishes, case management supports people in arranging, coordinating, and advocating for the services and programs they need.
- **Place-based supports and shelter diversion** – case management strategies designed to help people maintain their natural supports, such as friends and family, and local connections, such as school and community services.

There are also targeted early intervention strategies that support specific populations.

Examples include:

- **Family mediation and reunification** – The 'Family First' model is used to build natural supports for individuals at risk of, or who have experienced, homelessness by strengthening relationships between family members where it is safe and stable to do so. The model is often used among youth at risk of homelessness, as well as those transitioning from institutional settings who are being reunited with their families.

- **School-based early intervention strategy** – popularized across Australia, schools become partners in homelessness prevention by identifying students at risk of homelessness and connecting them with the necessary supports for themselves and their families to help stabilize their living situation and improve their connections to the community.
- **Intimate partner violence victim support** – providing safe accommodation and trauma-informed care to individuals (usually women) fleeing violence. This includes safe, secure, and confidential temporary housing and specialist support to help victims and their families make plans for the next steps.



## EVICCTIONS PREVENTION

A type of early intervention and housing stability, evictions prevention consists of a variety of strategies to reduce the risk that people will lose their housing. Evictions can occur ‘for cause’ or ‘no fault’. The most common for cause eviction is rent arrears (when tenants owe rent or pay it late), often due to inadequate income or job loss. Other factors include disturbing the landlord or other tenants, destruction of property, engaging in illegal activities, etc. No fault evictions occur when the landlord decides to use the property for another purpose.

Evictions prevention includes primary prevention measures such as strengthening landlord/tenant laws and social housing providers adopting a ‘no evictions’ mandate, to secondary and tertiary measures for those at high risk of eviction. Service providers in housing, health care, and social workers in other fields should have the funding, training, and professional development that allows them to identify and reach out to those at high risk of eviction. There are a variety of supports that can be offered to tenants based on their needs, including:

- Information and advice on rental housing issues and legal rights
- Legal support and representation
- Landlord liaison, conflict resolution, and mediation
- Rental assistance and supplements
- Emergency financial assistance
- Third party financial management



## HOUSING STABILITY

Housing stability are measures that support people to access and retain housing, in particular for those who have previously experienced homelessness, acting as a form of tertiary prevention. Housing First is a key model for promoting housing stability. The strategies offered through Housing First involve more than providing housing; housing must be complemented with a range of supports and services to meet individuals and families' needs and desires.

Housing stability involves a wide array of resources that supports people in a number of domains:

- 1) Housing supports** – help obtaining and retaining housing, rent supplements, ongoing support in case of crisis, evictions prevention, and continued aftercare support
- 2) Support for health and well-being** – recovery-oriented supports in terms of health and mental health care, trauma-informed care, and substance abuse and addictions
- 3) Supporting access to income and education** – Support to reach educational goals, employment training, and income supports for those who may not be easily employable
- 4) Complementary supports** – life skills training, advocacy to support those facing language barriers or difficulty accessing services due to trauma, stigma and/or discrimination, support with systems navigation, peer support from those who have shared experiences, and legal advice and representation
- 5) Enhancing social inclusion** – Support developing social relationships, family reconnection, creating opportunities for community and cultural engagement, and access to meaningful activities, arts, sports, or volunteering opportunities.

# Moving in a new direction

*A New Direction: The Framework on Homelessness Prevention* is not the last word on the subject of prevention. Instead, it acts as the starting place for a nation-wide conversation on how to shape prevention efforts in the years to come. We are at an important juncture in how we address homelessness in Canada. Preventing homelessness makes sense from an economic, social, and most importantly, human rights perspective. There are valuable examples internationally that provide the evidence base for prevention in Canada. In adapting the public health model of prevention, homelessness prevention efforts require broad, structural changes, including legislative and policy shifts that impact the population at large; targeted services for those at immediate risk of, or who have recently experienced, homelessness; and support for individuals who have previously experienced homelessness to ensure it doesn't happen again.

The definition of homelessness prevention and typology act as the building blocks for a comprehensive homelessness prevention strategy. The breadth of the typology reveals that homelessness prevention is truly a fusion policy issue, requiring the participation and investment of multiple sectors, including but not limited to: housing, employment, child protection, hospitals, education, and criminal justice.

**BY RECOGNIZING THAT EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO SAFE AND SUITABLE HOUSING AND THAT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND MOST DEPARTMENTS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN SECURING THESE RIGHTS, WE ARE WELL-POSITIONED TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA.**

Download *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention* at: [www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection](http://www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection)

