

2019 OXFORD GLOBAL CHALLENGE

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS IN TORONTO



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THANK YOU



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before we begin this report, there are a few points our team would like to address.

Positionality

Firstly, we want to establish our positionality in putting together this report. We are a team of five, privileged, non-Indigenous students who are completing their Master of Public Health at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health in Toronto. We are all settlers on this land. We would like to acknowledge that we are privileged and grateful to use this land, as for thousands of years it has been the land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. We realize that as non-Indigenous people, we will make mistakes in this field, and would like to apologize if we have made any errors or inaccuracies in the reporting of this paper.

Indigenous Identity

Secondly, we want to clarify the concept of Indigenous identity. Often, Indigenous Peoples are homogenized as one group of people with one culture and language. Contrary to popular belief, Indigenous Peoples are comprised of over 600 bands, 2000 reserves, and 200 languages (1–3). These bands comprise to three overarching groups; First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit (1–3). Although we recognize and understand the problematic nature of using a single term, for the purpose of this paper, the term “Indigenous Peoples” will be used to refer to the First Peoples of this land.

Definition of Homelessness

It is important to acknowledge that the colonial definition of homelessness is not universal. Jesse Thistle and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness developed the Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada, describing Indigenous homelessness through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews, transgressing the boundaries of physical structures (4). Home is rooted in circles of interconnectedness, thus Indigenous homelessness includes aspects such as the disconnect from land and culture, spiritual disconnection, and cultural disintegration (4). For the purposes of this paper and application of facts and statistics collected on the Indigenous homeless, the colonial definition of homelessness will be applied. However, it must also be noted that Indigenous Peoples are significantly understudied, and existing data is not always representative of the Indigenous population.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness continues to affect the lives of many Canadians (4,5). At least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any given year (6). To combat this, the Canadian government has developed national funding streams and 'Housing First' strategies (7). However, little progress has been made toward an effective long-term solution (8). In Toronto, the homeless population has reached unprecedented levels (9,10). 8715 people were reported to be homeless in April 2018 (10).

Of the homeless population, Indigenous Peoples continue to be over-represented (10). Many have called for the recognition of Indigenous-specific homelessness to address the disproportionate rates (4). As a result, this analysis will focus on Indigenous Peoples and homelessness in Toronto.



Allyship

Acting as an ally involves educating oneself about the impact of colonization, current issues, and the barriers faced by Indigenous people (11). Allyship requires problematizing one's agency, complicity, power, and privilege in relation to a Eurocentric lens (11). While it is not a self-appointed position, anti-colonial advocacy can be demonstrated through alliance building (11).



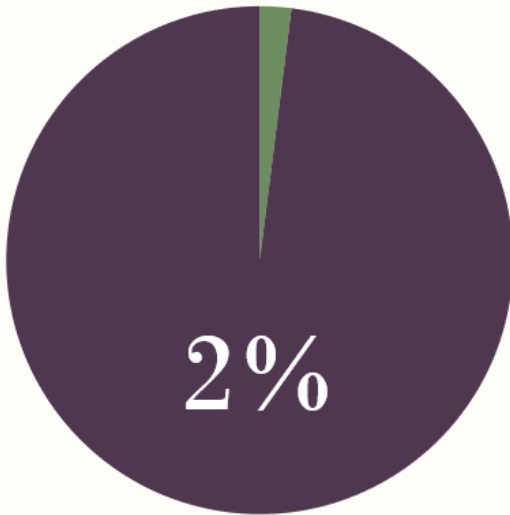
Indigenous Self-Determination

Reconciliation must begin by acknowledging Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-determination (12). By virtue of that right, they should be able to determine their own political status and economic, social, and cultural development (13). With greater self-government, Indigenous Peoples would be able to control the administration of their people, land, and resources (13).

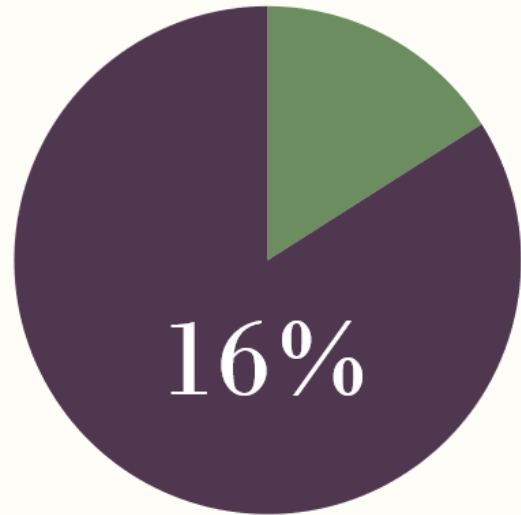


BACKGROUND

A summary of the Indigenous homelessness crisis in Toronto.



Proportion of Toronto population that identifies as Indigenous (14)



Proportion of Toronto homeless population that identifies as Indigenous (10)

In what is now known as Canada, Indigenous homelessness has emerged as a national crisis, and a significant issue in urban cities (6,10). In Toronto, Canada's most populated city, Indigenous Peoples constitute 16% of the region's homeless population (10).

Homelessness among Indigenous Peoples can be traced back to colonization (15–17). Systemic drivers include the Indian Act of 1876, the 'Sixties Scoop', and residential schools. Canada's legacy of forced assimilation by successive governments has taken a toll on the physical and mental health of Indigenous populations (17,18). Basic human rights that necessitate health, such as housing, income, education, and employment have been violated.

To address these determinants and ultimately combat Indigenous homelessness, Toronto-based Indigenous organizations offer culturally-relevant programs and services to Indigenous Peoples (19–21). Interventions at the community level have proven to be effective, yet systemic issues remain unaddressed, leading to the perpetuation of this issue.

PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

The factors causing and sustaining the issue.

Intergenerational Trauma

The intergenerational trauma caused due to colonization and continuing colonial practices has placed Indigenous Peoples in Canada at a severe economic, socio-cultural and spatial disadvantage (5,14). Understanding this history helps to illustrate the high proportions of Indigenous Peoples among the homeless today.

[1] Indian Act of 1876

The federal government attempted to eliminate Indigenous culture and traditions through the Indian Act. European colonizers sought to assimilate Indigenous Peoples through enfranchisement, whereby Indigenous Peoples would lose their official "Indian status" for reasons such as obtaining a university degree (22–24). In later years, the government began banning traditional Indigenous ceremonies, and even outlawed the hiring of lawyers to fight for Indigenous rights (25).



Intergenerational Trauma

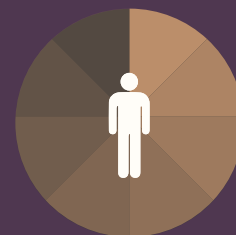
noun, definition

: a cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and passed across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.

Age of First Homelessness



General
31 years (10)

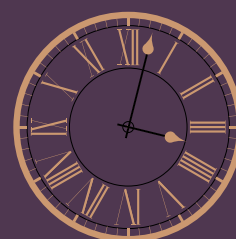


Indigenous
25 years (10)

Length of Homelessness



General
7 months (10)



Indigenous
9 months (10)

PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

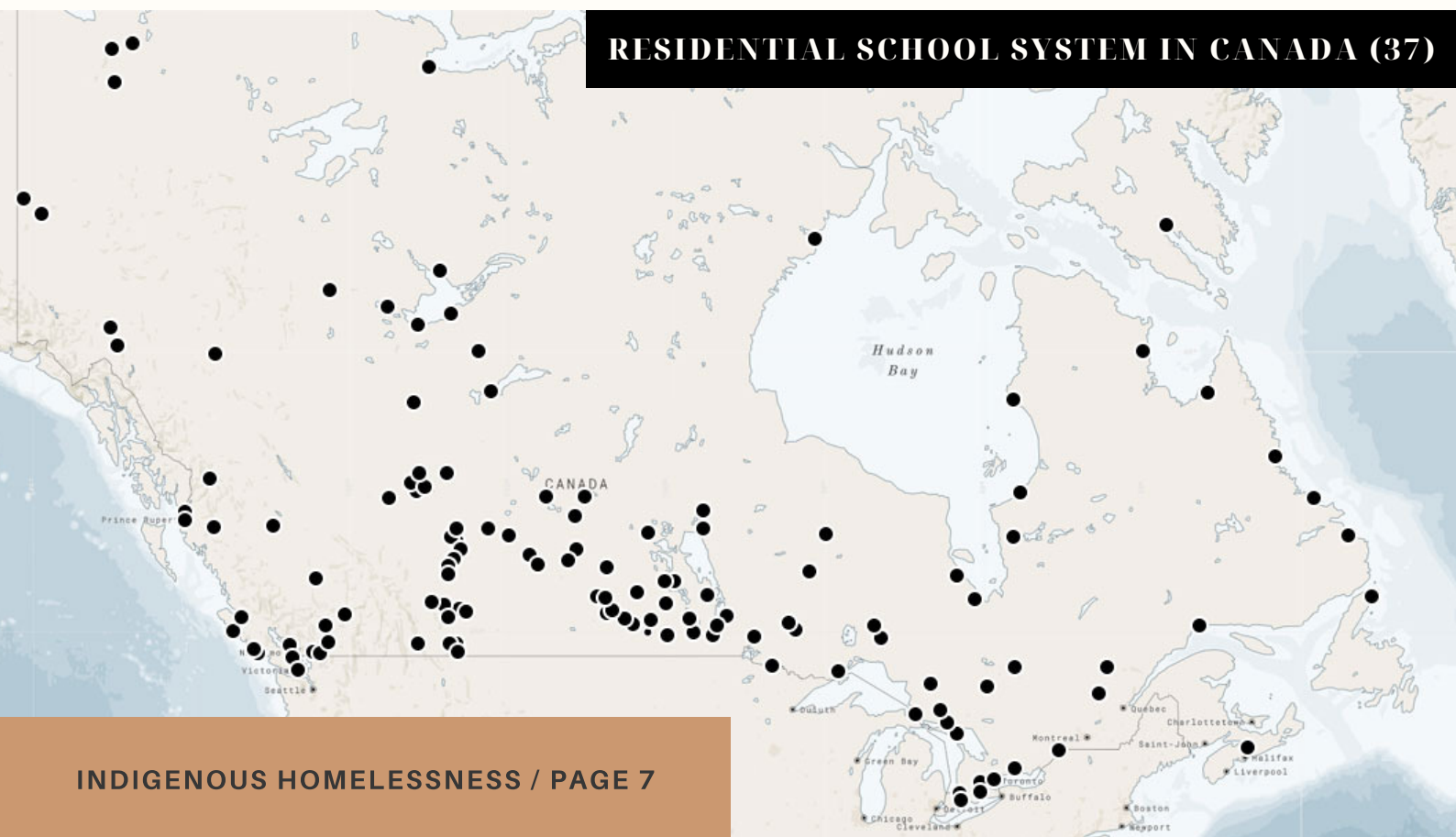
Intergenerational Trauma

[1] Indian Act of 1876

Indigenous Peoples were also forcibly removed from their land and onto reserves, land with few resources and economic opportunities (17,26,27). This disrupted traditional social networks and marginalized Indigenous Peoples from the growing economy (5,28).

[2] Residential Schools

Residential schools refers to the extensive school system Indigenous children were forced to attend, organized by the Canadian government and administered by Christian churches between the 1880s and 1990s (20). It was realized that the primary purpose of these schools was to eliminate all aspects of Indigenous culture in future generations (17,29–33). Aside from enduring physical, sexual and psychological abuse, these children were also prohibited from speaking their native languages - resulting in a loss of agency and rejection of their Indigenous heritage (5,32,33). Today, descendants of residential school survivors share similar burdens as their ancestors, including compromised family systems, loss of Indigenous language and identity, and perpetuation of abuse (17,34–36).



PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

Intergenerational Trauma

[3] 'Sixties' Scoop

Although known as the 'Sixties Scoop', the Government policy calling for the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families and into the child welfare system began in the 1950s and lasted beyond the 1980s (38,39).

Indigenous parents living in poverty, but otherwise providing caring homes, had their children taken from them with little warning and no consent. Many children moved from one foster home to the next, or lived in institutionalized care (40,41). Physical and sexual abuse was not uncommon (41,42).

Children growing up in conditions of suppressed identity and abuse eventually experienced psychological and emotional problems (38,43). These issues are manifesting today as these children become adults (35,38,43).

'Millennial Scoop'

In 2016, Indigenous children 14 years of age and younger represented 52.2% of children in foster care in Canada (44). However, they constitute less than 8% of all children in the country (44). The federal government is severely underfunding the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Department, the federal agency tasked to deliver child welfare, health and social services to Indigenous Peoples on reserve (45). Thus, Indigenous families have to give up their children to provincial foster care services in order to get help. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found the federal government to racially discriminate against children on reserves, as on-reserve welfare systems receive up to 38% less funding than others (46–48). The result is that there are more children in foster care today than there were during the height of the 'Sixties Scoop' (45,49,50).

20,000+

Estimated number of Indigenous children taken from their home and placed in non-Indigenous homes (51).

PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

Proximal Drivers

These colonial events have led to a generational loss of culture and identity in Indigenous Peoples, causing a myriad of proximal drivers continuing to plague Indigenous Peoples. These drivers, though not exhaustive, are interconnected and interdependent, sustaining the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples among the homeless population today.



[1] Racism

Racist practices developed by the Canadian government against Indigenous Peoples perpetuates in society today. 54% of Indigenous adults in Toronto reported experiencing racism in the last year (14). When seeking housing, Indigenous Peoples have been asked (illegally) to pay up to six months rent in advance, and landlords have rejected Indigenous renters based on negative stereotypes including assumptions on heavy alcohol consumption or smoking on property (52–54). According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, demands for unrealistic and illegal deposits, extensive background checks, and written references are common forms of discrimination against Indigenous Peoples that prevent them from being able to obtain housing (53,55).

[2] Mental Health

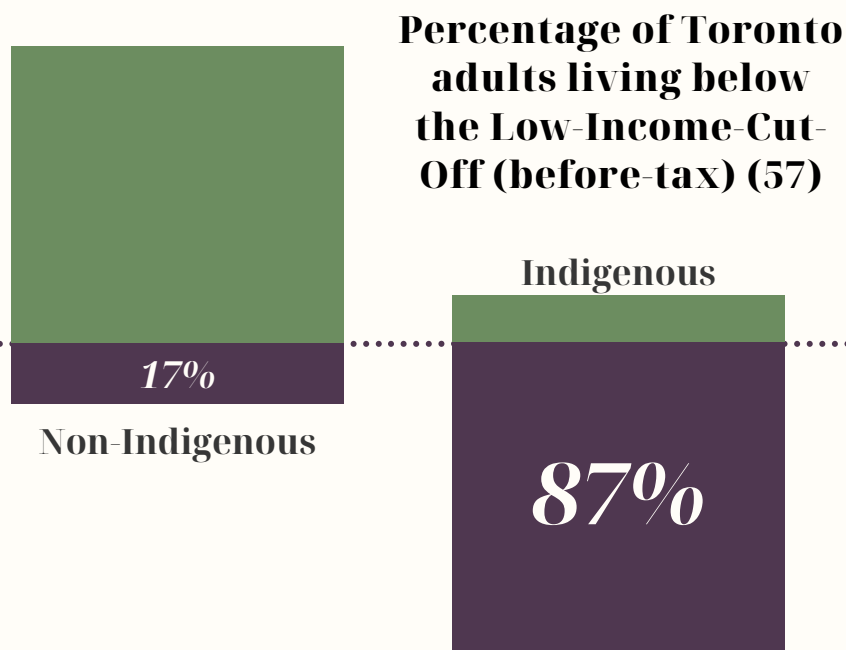
Mental health is a longstanding issue with Indigenous Peoples due to colonization and intergenerational trauma. Only 31% of Indigenous adults in Toronto reported very good or excellent mental health, compared to 72% of the general Canadian population (14). Indigenous Peoples have a higher prevalence of nearly every mental health condition compared to the general population, and these rates may be under-reported as access to health care professionals is a major issue (14). Indigenous populations have suffered extensive amounts of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, leading to adverse mental health conditions, and increasing their likelihood of becoming homeless.

PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

Proximal Drivers

[3] Employment and Poverty

Studies have shown that regions with the most poverty have the highest proportion of Indigenous Peoples and visible minorities (56). 87% of Indigenous adults in Toronto fall below the Low-Income-Cut-Off (before tax), compared to only 17% of non-Indigenous adults (57). These areas were also found to have high unemployment. 63% of Indigenous adults in Toronto are unemployed compared to only 7% of adults in Ontario (57). Also, having had their land and property taken away, few Indigenous Peoples have financial credit to be able to borrow money. Many Indigenous Peoples simply do not have the financial resources to pay for housing in Toronto.



[4] Migration Off Reserves

As of 2016, 4 out of every 5 Indigenous persons lives off reserve (58). Since the 1970s, there has been mass migration of Indigenous Peoples into urban areas, due to severe overcrowding, incessant unsafe drinking water, unaffordable healthy foods, lack of reliable electricity, and a dearth of educational, economic, and employment availabilities on reserves (26,59–65). Indigenous Peoples on reserve have a median income \$9000 less than those off reserve (66). Thus, Indigenous People move to major urban centres in search of opportunity. However, due to gaps in services to support those transitioning to urban centres, many Indigenous people are inadequately prepared for life in the city.

PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

Proximal Drivers

[5] Housing Crisis

Since 2005, only 60 rental buildings have been built in Toronto, adding less than 12,000 units when the city is welcoming 17,000 new renters annually (67). The result has been a boom in demand and prices across the city. In October 2005, the monthly cost of a one-bedroom rental unit was \$900 (68). 13 years later, the price has risen 45% to \$1300, while an average one-bedroom condo rental is \$2100 (68,69). In comparison, average wages

\$900

One month rent for one-bedroom rental in 2005 (68)

\$1300

One month rent for one-bedroom rental in 2018 (68)

increased by only 10% between 1998 and 2011 (69). In addition, there are currently about 100,000 people on the subsidized housing waitlist in Toronto (70). As more people migrate to urban centres, demand on housing will increase, making prices unaffordable.

[6] Justice System and Correctional Services

In Canada, Indigenous adults are 10 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous Peoples (71). Indigenous inmates represented 28% of the total federal in-custody population while comprising only 4.3% of the national population (72).

The overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in correctional facilities and the judicial system is rooted in colonial oppression, marginalization, and systemic racism (32,33). Furthermore, evidence has shown that Western correctional services and programs are not adequate to rehabilitate Indigenous Peoples leaving the justice system (34). Therefore, many Indigenous Peoples end up homeless or back in prison without appropriate support.

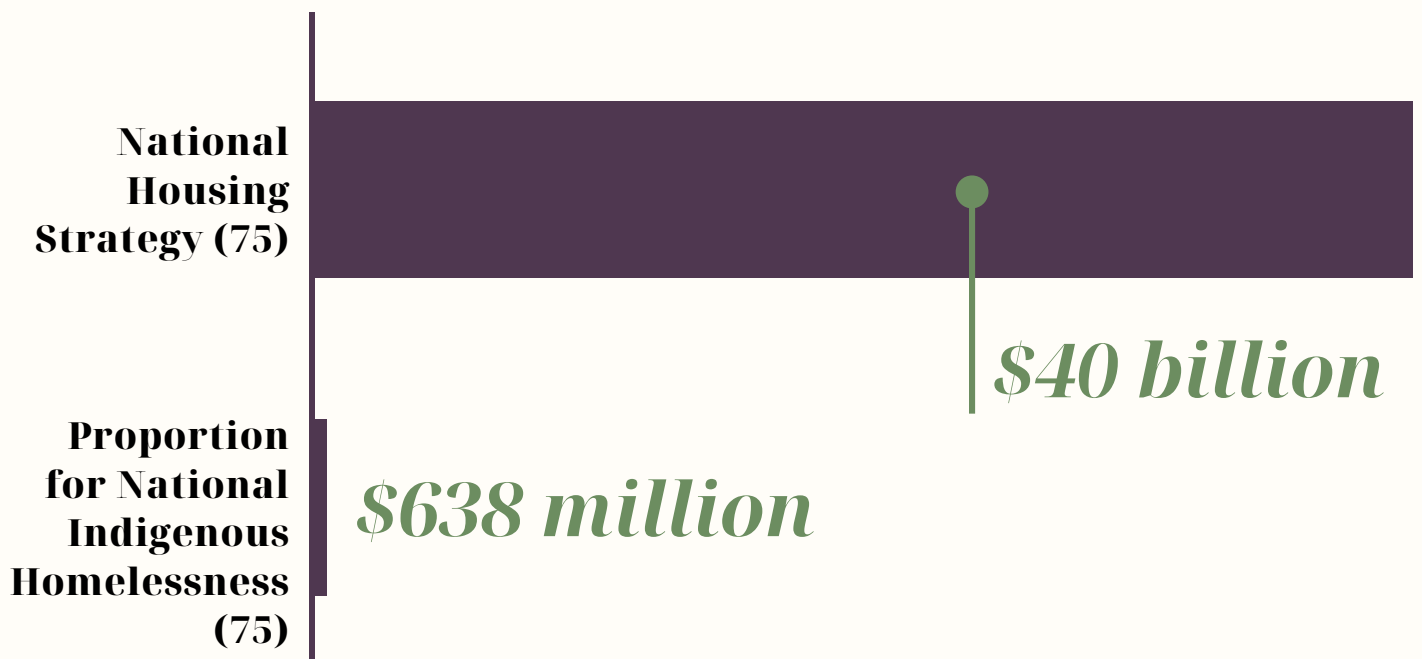
10x

Indigenous adults are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous adults (71).

SOLUTIONS LANDSCAPE

Federal

The federal government plans to spend \$638 million on housing for Indigenous Peoples living in urban areas (75). This funding is part of the Liberal's \$40 billion housing strategy which aims to reduce homelessness in Canada by 50% over the next 10 years (76,77). This announcement follows the \$72 million invested between 2007-2015 to engage and educate people about the history and legacy of the residential schools system (18).



Provincial

At the provincial level, the government has implemented an Ontario Aboriginal Housing initiative to provide \$20 million to tackle Indigenous Homelessness in Ontario (78). Eligibility for the funds can be allotted to any service provider in Ontario providing locally relevant solutions in preventing, as well as aiding the transition of Indigenous Peoples out of homelessness. Nevertheless, the flaws of this funding system are demonstrated by the lack of impact of the funds - causing division instead of collaboration between support services.

SOLUTIONS LANDSCAPE

Municipal

In 2016, Toronto's first Indigenous Health Strategy was implemented as a way to address the city's issue of Indigenous Homelessness (79). This involves three strategic directions aimed at applying an Indigenous cultural lens to Toronto's homelessness and housing programs. The first strategic direction involves reducing health inequities for Indigenous Peoples (79). The second involves influencing the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health by integrating supportive housing policies for women, children, and families (79). The third and final strategic direction aims to further harmonize Indigenous and Mainstream Health Programs and Services (79).



Community

Indigenous housing organizations such as Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res) are one of few local service providers offering downstream levels of support for homeless Indigenous men (80). Na-Me-Res' abstinence-based housing model includes provision of shelter and culturally-based programming such as Sagatay, Mino Kaanjigoowin, and Apaenmowineen (21). Indigenous traditions and spiritual healing often play a vital role in starting the first steps of acknowledging trauma and initiating the healing process among Indigenous communities (21,81). Furthermore, life-skills training and forms of community engagement are also offered, from connecting with landlords, employers, to access to long-term follow-up services with Indigenous psychiatrists and nurses.

Similarly, the Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto provides trauma-informed care for Indigenous women in Toronto (82). Programs include housing services, child care, and support for women experiencing domestic violence or sexual abuse (82).



GAPS & LEVERS OF CHANGE

Gap 1: Lack of funding and transparency

1

Increase funding for Indigenous homelessness to prevent competition between Indigenous-based services

2

Set tangible goals for reduction of Indigenous homelessness with reporting to an established Indigenous Affairs Committee

3

Provide multi-year funding opportunities with straightforward application and renewal processes

Gap 2: Inadequate and inappropriate homeless services

1

Need for more culturally- and tradition-based, Indigenous-led homeless organizations with flexible service models

2

Non-Indigenous providers implement Indigenous-relevant care with cultural safety & anti-oppression training

3

Development of programs providing Indigenous homeless with adequate life-skills to be able to live in urban centres

Gap 3: Dearth of Indigenous power, resources and advocacy

1

Joint advocacy initiative for Indigenous presence at political decision-making levels (ex. Indigenous City Councillor)

2

Development of awareness-raising program aimed at Toronto citizens around legacy and impact of colonization

3

Develop and implement a housing monitoring committee comprised of Indigenous members and housing providers

Gap 4: Absence of integration of Indigenous knowledge in colonial civilization

1

Integration of Indigenous ways of knowing along with best practices of colonial civilization (Two-Eyed Seeing approach)

2

Development of education curriculum about Indigenous history and the ongoing impacts of colonization

3

Collaboration between Indigenous Elders/knowledge keepers and Western healthcare/justice system to aid Indigenous Peoples with mental health conditions

FUTURE FOCUS

Indigenous Self-Determination and Governance

Promote Indigenous self-determination and enable decision-making power within policy and program development processes to reinforce Indigenous governance.

Capacity-Building, Partnerships, and Development

Create and maintain equal partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies to develop services that operate outside of regular service hours.

Accountability and Policy

Implement a national agreement during funding policy-making to ensure clear accountabilities, roles, and responsibilities across all parties are set prior to any intervention.

Research and Evaluation

Prioritization of government funding efforts and targeted investments must be based on culturally-responsive evaluation approaches with direction from Indigenous communities.

Cultural Reconnection & Community-Directed Governance

Homelessness services and programs must be culturally-responsive and tailored to a diverse diaspora of Indigenous groups using place-based and regional approaches.

Two-Eyed Seeing Model

Integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and Non-Indigenous best practices to develop and increase accessibility to culturally-based care and life-skill development programs.

