

# Homeless in Canada



## A Funder's Primer in Understanding the Tragedy on Canada's Streets

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The purpose of this report is to help people across Canada have a better understanding of our homeless situation based on evidence rather than myths, and bring to the public's attention programs that work in helping the homeless. With better information, we hope Canadians can make informed and intelligent giving decisions that will create results for those in need.

To make a donation to a Ci recommended homeless charity please visit the website [www.charityintelligence.ca](http://www.charityintelligence.ca) or call 905.833.0075.

“ Our small streams of contribution have the potential to fill expansive oceans. ”

—Tokyo Sexwale

## Key Research Findings

- An estimated 157,000 people are homeless each year in Canada.
- For the 20% who remain homeless for more than 3 months, the chronically homeless, life on the streets and in shelters creates cascading trauma leading to addiction, abuse and suicide.
- Chronic homelessness is deadly, resulting in an estimated 1,350 people dying each year which is half the number of Canadians killed in car accidents. The average life expectancy of a homeless person in Canada is 39 years.
- The chronically homeless are the hardest to help but present the greatest social return opportunity in Ci's opinion. The chronic homeless incur large economic costs – an estimated \$1.1 billion or \$35,000 cost per person each year through being inappropriately 'housed' in jails and temporary shelters and using hospital emergency departments.
- Escape from homelessness is possible – there are ways funders can effectively help. An innovative 'housing first approach' is producing breakout results with those who have been hardest to help. The Pathways program in New York City has an 88% success rate housing the chronic homeless for a cost of US \$24,000 each year.
- Organizations that work with the homeless have the best results when they provide individual choice, dignity, recovery opportunities, and community.<sup>1</sup>



“ We can be moved by the tragedy of mass starvation on a far continent... But it takes a greater effort of emotional imagination to empathize with the addict. We readily feel for a suffering child, but cannot see the child in the adult who, his soul fragmented and isolated, hustles for survival a few blocks away from where we shop or work. ”

— Gabor Mate

## Executive Summary

Andrew was a happy child, a boy scout and a good student in school. When he was 17 the voices began. His schizophrenia was difficult to control, he rebelled against medications which left him feeling numb. His family could no longer cope alone with Andrew's erratic behaviour and he went to live in a group facility. When this did not address his needs, Andrew struck off on his own. Living alone was too great a challenge, and without steady wages, Andrew was evicted from his apartment and became homeless.

Carrie has long blond hair and beautiful blue eyes and loves to read Dostoevsky. At age 8 her step-father began raping her. Living with on-going sexual abuse, Carrie escaped from 'home' at age 16. Carrie lives on the streets with Patches, her part-Rottweiler dog. Patches is her only source of unconditional love and companionship, offering protection, trust and body heat. Dogs are not allowed in the emergency shelters, so for four years Carrie has lived in a make-shift shanty camp.

Rob drank his first beer with his dad when he was 11. Within 2 years he was an alcoholic, hiding his daily drinking from his parents. To pay for booze, Rob began stealing, starting first with petty theft escalating to bank robberies. By 20, Rob was in federal jail. For the next 22 years, he was either in jail or drinking, moving from job to job. Rob would be dry for sometime, holding a job, but his alcoholism was always lurking, leading Rob to homelessness for years.

Homelessness is the result we see – people lining up at shelters, sleeping on park benches, and squatting in doorways. But the causes of homelessness are varied. Addiction, severe mental illness, and child abuse are primary causes of years living on the streets. In most every case homelessness is triggered by a single crisis beyond a person's control which cascades. Without effective early intervention and family or community support, people fall through the gaps leading to a desperate life on the streets. Homelessness can happen to anyone. But for the Grace of God we too could be homeless.

Sadly we may view the homeless through the distorting lens of morality or character, judging those living on the streets as lazy, undeserving or less worthy than ourselves. Worse is the attitude that people choose to be homeless. No one in their right mind would choose to be homeless with its violence, stress and degradation. Sometimes sleeping on the streets is safer than being in a crowded emergency shelter. Homelessness reflects a failure in us and organizations to provide appropriate and responsive care.

It doesn't have to be this way. There are effective programs and services that work to intervene with those who are homeless. The waitlists of these programs and their capacity to work with more people, is only constrained by the lack of funding.

This is where you can help: to read this report, to understand the key factors of Canada's homeless crisis, and to learn about organizations that have track records and proven results in restoring the lives of the homeless. With the expertise of outstanding organizations and your funding we hope to take a step in meaningful support to help Canada's homeless – providing them with a community of shelter and support, to restore their dignity and humanity. You can make a difference in helping fellow Canadians regain their lives and achieve their potential.



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