*Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience homelessness again. Rather, it means that systems are in place to ensure that any experience of homelessness is brief and permanently resolved, and rare overall.*

***\*\*Glossary of Terms: The following terms and examples are taken directly from the Reaching home Homelessness Glossary for Communities, which is available in full*** [***here***](https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Homelessness_Glossary_for_Communities.pdf) ***.***

# HOMELESSNESS:

**What is homelessness?**

Definitions related to the experience of homelessness are outlined below.

**Homeless population**

The number of people experiencing homelessness in a geographic area.

**Root causes of homelessness**

The root causes of homelessness are complex, arising from a combination of structural factors, systemic barriers, and personal or relational circumstances that require a range of interventions. In some cases, especially in the North and in Indigenous communities, there are simply not enough suitable units to house the population, and this shortage has been ongoing for decades. In other cases, especially for people with long-term or recurrent homelessness, it is a result of complex housing and service needs, which often include mental health issues and/or substance use disorders. For Indigenous peoples in Canada, specific dimensions and factors linked to colonization, displacement and intergenerational trauma must also be considered. A shared reality for everyone experiencing homelessness is poverty.

**Complex problem**

A complex problem is a situation where causes and solutions are not always clear or straightforward. There are many actors involved, sometimes with competing perspectives. Homelessness is a complex problem that extends beyond the scope of any single organization or sector. Its response requires a shared understanding about the problem and a shared commitment to possible solutions. Data plays a critical role in solving complex problems like homelessness. Data can help with defining the problem, as well as analyzing its causes and possible solutions, leading to a greater likelihood that the best options – those with the greatest potential for collective impact – are implemented. Continuous communication and reflection is required to learn and improve responses over time.

**Homelessness**

The situation of an individual or family who does not have a permanent address or residence, and does not have the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it. In general, homelessness includes people staying in unsheltered locations, in shelters or somewhere temporarily because they do not have the resources to secure their own permanent housing. People experiencing homelessness often transition between locations, as most people who sleep outside are likely to access shelter at some point. More specifically, homeless episodes can include time spent:

• In emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds);

• In unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation (e.g., parks);

• Staying temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); or,

• In short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings).

**Visible homelessness**

Visible homelessness refers to staying in unsheltered locations or shelters.

**At-risk and at imminent risk of homelessness**

At-risk of homelessness refers to a housing situation that is precarious. For example, the housing may not meet public health and safety standards (e.g., due to overcrowding) or the tenant may not be paying rent on-time and/or may have rental arrears.

At imminent risk of homelessness refers to a housing situation that will end in the near future (e.g., within two weeks) where the household does not have the immediate prospect, means or ability of acquiring a subsequent residence.

**Unsheltered homelessness**

People experiencing homelessness that are staying in unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation. For example, streets, alleys, parks and other public locations, transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles, ravines and other outdoor locations. Under Reaching Home, unsheltered homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes, the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum, and Point-in-Time Counts (where unsheltered homelessness is part of the core methodology for the enumeration and survey).

**Sheltered homelessness**

People experiencing homelessness that are staying in emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds). This includes the following types of shelter spaces: • Shelters for all population groups; • Shelters for specific population groups (e.g., men, women, youth or families) or situations (e.g., extreme weather or crises); and, • Domestic Violence (DV) shelters. People may also be staying at alternative shelter sites, such as hotels or motels, where their stays are paid for by the service provider (e.g., through a voucher or arrangement with the operator), not privately (e.g., through income or savings). Under Reaching Home, sheltered homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes, the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum, and Point-in-Time Counts (where sheltered homelessness is part of the core methodology for the enumeration and survey).

**Hidden homelessness**

People experiencing homelessness that are staying:

• Temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); or,

• In short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings).

In general, hidden homelessness includes people staying somewhere temporarily because they do not have the resources to secure their own permanent housing (e.g., persons facing financial difficulties and recently evicted). These living situations are precarious and people could be asked to leave at any time.

It is acknowledged that measuring hidden homelessness is challenging. To determine who falls in the category of “hidden”, people may be asked, for example, “Are you currently living in this household temporarily because you have no where else to live?”

Under Reaching Home, hidden homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes and the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum. That being said, for Point-in-Time Counts, people experiencing hidden homelessness are not included in enumeration, just the survey.

**Staying in public institutions**

The situation of an individual that is staying in a public institution who does not have a permanent address or residence, and does not have the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it

**Indigenous homelessness**

Recognizing the diversity of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and that Indigenous peoples may choose to refer to themselves in their own languages, the following definition of Indigenous homelessness is inclusive of First Nations, Metis and Inuit, status and nonstatus persons, regardless of residency or membership status.

For the purposes of Reaching Home, and subject to revision based on ongoing engagement and consultation with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous homelessness refers to: “Indigenous peoples who are in the state of having no home due to colonization, trauma and/or whose social, cultural, economic, and political conditions place them in poverty. Having no home includes: those who alternate between shelter and unsheltered, living on the street, couch surfing, using emergency shelters, living in unaffordable, inadequate, substandard and unsafe accommodations or living without the security of tenure; anyone regardless of age, released from facilities (such as hospitals, mental health and addiction treatment centers, prisons, transition houses), fleeing unsafe homes as a result of abuse in all its definitions, and any youth transitioning from all forms of care”

**Youth homelessness**

Refers to the situation and experience of young people (e.g., between the ages of 13 and 24) who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, and do not have a permanent address or residence, or the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it. 17 Youth homelessness is a complex social issue as it occurs during a time of significant developmental change for the young person, including social, physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. To be effective, youth-specific interventions need to take these factors into consideration.

**CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS:**

# Chronic homelessness

# Refers to persistent or long-term homelessness where people have:

# • Been homeless for at least 180 days at some point over the course of a year (not necessarily consecutive days); and/or,

# • Recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total at least 18 months. The measure of chronicity only includes sheltered, unsheltered and hidden homelessness.

# More specifically, it only includes time spent in the following living situations:

# • Emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds, including those for people experiencing domestic violence);

# • Unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation (e.g., parks);

# • Staying temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); and,

# • Short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings). It does not include time spent in transitional housing or public institutions (e.g., hospital or corrections), although people who are discharged into homelessness from these living situations can be considered chronically homeless if they were experiencing chronic homelessness upon entry to transitional housing or a public institution.

# This experience can also be further described as acute chronicity or prolonged instability:

# • Acute chronicity: Homelessness for at least 180 days at some point over the course of a year (not necessarily consecutive days); and/or,

# • Prolonged instability: Recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total at least 18 months. Any individual may experience acute chronicity, prolonged instability or both.

# Inflow/Outflow to Homelessness

Inflow and Outflow are two of the most important measures for monitoring progress towards our goal of ending homelessness. The goal is to see outflow exceed inflow. When this happens, it means that more people are exiting from homelessness than are entering the homeless-serving system.

**Inflows into homelessness**

A way of describing pathways into a homeless-serving system for people experiencing homelessness. Sometimes referred to as “entering the system”.

Inflows include transitions to homelessness for people that are “new to the system” (or “newly identified”) or “returning to the system”. People may be experiencing homelessness for the first time (“new to homelessness”) or returning to homelessness.

For example, people can “inflow into homelessness” when they interact with the homeless-serving system after the following:

• Leaving any form of housing (e.g., with or without subsidies or support; living alone or with others) either by choice or eviction;

• Being discharged from a public institution (e.g., hospital, correctional facility or child welfare); or,

• Being discharged from a transitional housing program.

It is recommended that communities disaggregate their “inflow” data, so that transitions into homelessness from living situations that were permanent (e.g., left permanent housing) can be tracked separately from those that were temporary (e.g., discharged from a public institution or transitional housing program). Likewise, it is recommended that communities track the following transitions into homelessness separately:

• “New to homelessness” (first time experience of homelessness);

• “New to the system” (interacted with the local homeless-serving system for the first time);

• “Return to homelessness” (previous experience of homelessness); and,

• “Return to the system” (interacted with the local homeless-serving system before).

Of note, from a systems perspective, “inflows” also include people experiencing homelessness that disengaged from the system and then re-engaged after a period of inactivity, even though they were homeless throughout that time. These “inflows” should also be tracked separately.

Inflows into homelessness and HIFIS:

• “New to homelessness” and “return to homelessness” are tracked through housing history.

• “New to the system” is tracked using the date a client file was created.

• People can “inflow into homelessness” where a previous living situation is unknown; this is considered “new to the system”. As communities improve their data management practices and achieve complete housing histories for each 20 person, the number of people that “inflow” from an unknown housing status will decrease

**New to homelessness**

Experiencing homelessness for the first time in a person’s life.

To determine who falls in the category of “new”, people may be asked, for example, “When did you experience homelessness for the first time?” Only those that have never been homeless before would be counted as “new”.

“New to homelessness” includes people who have never experienced homelessness before and those that, prior to the current episode, were:

• Living in any form of housing and left (by choice or eviction).

• Staying in a public institution and were discharged; or,

• Staying in a temporary program like transitional housing and were discharged.

It is recommended that communities disaggregate their “new to homelessness” data, so that transitions into homelessness from living situations that were permanent (e.g., left permanent housing) can be tracked separately from those that were temporary (e.g., discharged from a public institution or transitional housing program).

In HIFIS, “new to homelessness" is tracked through housing history. For greater clarity, for those that have never experienced homelessness before, being admitted to a public institution does not count as “new to homelessness”.

**New to the system (“newly identified”)**

The experience of being homeless and interacting with the homeless-serving system for the first time (e.g., first date of contact) and/or being included in HIFIS for the first time.

People who are “new to the system” (or “newly identified”) may or may not be “new to homelessness”. For example, people that experienced homelessness in the past, but only recently interacted with the homeless-serving system, would be counted as “new to the system” on the date that they first interacted with the system.

It is recommended that communities disaggregate their “new to the system” data, so that the number of people that are experiencing homelessness for the first time can be tracked separately from those that were homeless before they first interacted with the system. For those that were experiencing homelessness before interacting with the system, it is also recommended that the number of days between the first day of homelessness and the date they first interacted with the homeless-serving system is also tracked.

In HIFIS, the date that people are “new to system” is the date a client file was created. For greater clarity, if someone has never interacted with the homeless-serving system before, being admitted to a public institution does not count as “new to the system”.

**Outflow** represents the number of individuals who have moved from staying in shelter or unsheltered locations to housed and those who have moved to inactive status (meaning they have not interacted with the homeless-serving system for 60+ days).

**Outflows from homelessness**

A way of describing pathways from a homeless-serving system for people who have experienced homelessness. Sometimes referred to as “exiting the system”.

Outflows include transitions to living situations that do not count toward the federal calculation of homelessness. For example, people can “outflow from homelessness” when they:

• Move into any form of housing (e.g., with or without subsidies or support; living alone or with others) by any process (e.g., a self-directed housing search, with help from a service provider, through Coordinated Access or referral to another sector/system);

• Enter a public institution (e.g., hospital or correctional facility); or,

• Enter a transitional housing program.

It is recommended that communities disaggregate their “outflow” data, so that transitions from homelessness to living situations that were permanent (e.g., moved to permanent housing) can be tracked separately from those that were temporary (e.g., entered a public institution or transitional housing program). This can help to clarify how many people “outflowed” and will not need housing (e.g., because moved into supportive housing) versus those that may need help with a housing plan at some point (e.g., they are in the hospital, but do not yet have permanent housing).

From a systems perspective, “outflows” also include people that have disengaged from the homeless-serving system (become inactive), even if they continue to experience homelessness. As such, an “outflow” may not mean an experience of homelessness has been resolved (e.g., people staying in an encampment that are not engaging with any form of outreach). These “outflows” should also be tracked separately. Of note, “outflows” also include people who have died.

Outflows from homelessness and HIFIS:

• Changes in housing status are tracked through housing history.

• Changes to client state (e.g., being active or inactive) are tracked automatically (e.g., if no transactions are documented for 90 days, that person goes inactive).

**Return to homelessness**

The experience of being homeless again in someone’s life.

To determine who falls in the category of “returning”, people may be asked, for example, “Have you experienced homelessness in the past?” Only those that have been homeless before would be counted as “returning”. For example, people may “return to homelessness” if they:

• Were experiencing homelessness;

• Then, they moved into permanent housing and were discharged from a service provider’s caseload (e.g., no longer receive case management supports); and,

• Then, a year later, they lost that housing and accessed emergency shelter.

More specifically, returns include people who have experienced homelessness before and:

• Left any form of housing (e.g., with or without subsidies or support; living alone or with others) either by choice or eviction;

• Were discharged from a public institution and had a previous experience of homelessness (e.g., hospital or correctional facility); or, 22

• Were discharged from a transitional housing program and had a previous experience of homelessness.

It is recommended that communities disaggregate their “return to homelessness” data, so that transitions from living situations that were permanent (e.g., left permanent housing) can be tracked separately from those that were temporary (e.g., discharged from a public institution or transitional housing program).

In HIFIS, return to homelessness is tracked through housing history.

For greater clarity, for those that have experienced homelessness before, being admitted to a public institution does not count as “return to homelessness”.

**Return to the system**

The experience of being homeless and interacting with the homeless-serving system again.

People who are “returning to the system” may or may not be “returning to homelessness”. From a systems perspective, “returns to the system” could include people that disengaged from the system and then re-engaged after a period of inactivity, even though they continued to be homeless. These “returns to the system” should be tracked separately from returns that are the result of a change in housing status (e.g., returns to the system after being asked to leave a family home and entering a shelter).

For greater clarity, if someone has interacted with the homeless-serving system before, being admitted to a public institution does not count as “return to the system”.

**Ending homelessness: Functional zero and absolute zero**

There are two main ways to understand the “end” to homelessness:

• **A Functional Zero** end to homelessness means that communities have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

• **Absolute Zero** refers to a true end to homelessness, where everyone has access to supports and appropriate, affordable housing s