

New Research Uncovers Solutions for Ending Canada's Homeless Tragedy

First analytical report of its kind for Canada's social investors

Toronto (Nov. 17) – Charity Intelligence Canada (Ci), a charity that analyzes the performance of Canadian charities, has today released its *Homeless in Canada* report, an innovative research report for donors and funders, revealing the root causes, provincial comparisons and costs of homelessness, as well as solutions to this tragic problem.

According to Ci, an estimated 157,000 people are homeless in Canada each year, including 125,000 who are transitionally homeless and 32,000 who are chronically homeless.* Of the 3.2 million Canadians who are reported to live below the poverty line, 10 per cent are considered at risk of becoming homeless this year.

The human toll of homelessness in Canadian cities and towns is staggering. The life expectancy of an individual living long-term on the streets and in shelters is 39 years. The suicide rate among the homeless is 460 per 100,000, compared with the national average rate of 11.6 – nearly 40 times higher.

“The years people remain homeless is profoundly troubling and the individual stories even more so. Myths prevail that homeless people actually like living on the streets – that they choose to be homeless, that they don't want help. No one in their right mind would choose to be homeless. Those who are the most vulnerable among us – victims of child abuse, those with severe mental health illness, and addicts – fall between the gaps and are left to fend for themselves on Canada's streets,” said Kate Bahen, Managing Director, Charity Intelligence Canada.

The cost to taxpayers is additionally troubling. Based on the conventional practices of managing Canada's homeless in 2008, taxpayers paid out \$1.3 billion in criminal justice, social services, emergency shelter and health care costs. The chronically homeless represent the highest cost to taxpayers at a conservatively-estimated \$35,000 per year, per individual. The longer people remain homeless, the higher the costs.

“We often assume that homelessness is just a big city phenomenon, but our study calculates that this tragedy plagues big cities and smaller towns, from Sudbury to Victoria – all across Canada. No municipality is immune,” said Bahen.

Canada's chronic homeless, those who have lived for more than a year on the streets and in shelters, have always been the hardest to help. “Business as usual” is not working with mediocre results in helping the chronic homeless at high cost.

* *The transitional homeless are those who experienced relatively short-term homelessness lasting on average 20 days in emergency shelters only once in their lifetime. The chronically homeless are those who use shelters and other institutions, such as mental health hospitals, detoxification centres and jails, on a long-term, recurrent basis.*

“Shuffling people between jails, mental hospitals and shelters is wrong. Getting these people off the street quickly and into secure housing is the surest, indeed most proven and effective way to reduce homelessness,” said Bahen. “It is also the most financially prudent solution.”

One relatively new and innovative program in particular, Pathways to Housing, has used housing as the first line of attack in reducing chronic homelessness with great results. Developed in New York City, Pathways gets chronically homeless individuals into ordinary, safe apartments before starting any preliminary intervention measures or therapies, such as alcohol detoxification or drug rehabilitation. This unconventional approach has achieved an 88 per cent success rate in keeping people housed long-term, compared to 47 per cent for those put through government-sponsored programs. It also costs only \$23,717 per year to house participants in apartments, compared to \$65,000 for a community residence, \$27,000 for a cot in a shelter and \$85,000 for a bed in a jail.

Ci has found similar charities working across Canada’s frontlines with even better results and lower costs.

Ci estimates that to provide safe housing for Canada’s 32,000 chronic homeless would cost \$800 million. This is a savings of \$10,000 in costs per homeless person each year. Assuming that an 85 per cent success rate can be replicated, the housing-first approach would produce a cost savings of \$272 million per year.

These are intimidating numbers, but Canadians *can* help effect change.

“Canada’s homeless situation is largely ignored. We step around the homeless on our streets, we avert our eyes, we give spare change but fail to make real change,” said Bahen. “All Canadians can play a part in reducing this tragedy on our streets by donating to homeless charities this giving season.”

A full copy of the *Homeless in Canada* report, including a list of Ci’s recommended charities, is available at www.charityintelligence.ca.

About Charity Intelligence Canada : Charity Intelligence Canada (Ci) is a Canadian charity that provides donors with information, empowering them to learn how their generosity can impact real change. Ci acts as an objective broker for donors, providing evidence-based research and standardized analysis to help donors make intelligent, more strategic giving decisions. Mirroring the strategies used by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and using investment models, Ci helps donors to be social investors.

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