

The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) is in year three of leading Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. The following provides a general overview of the issue of homelessness in Calgary.

What does it mean to be homeless?

Homelessness is defined by The City of Calgary as "those who do not have a permanent residence to which they can return whenever they so choose."

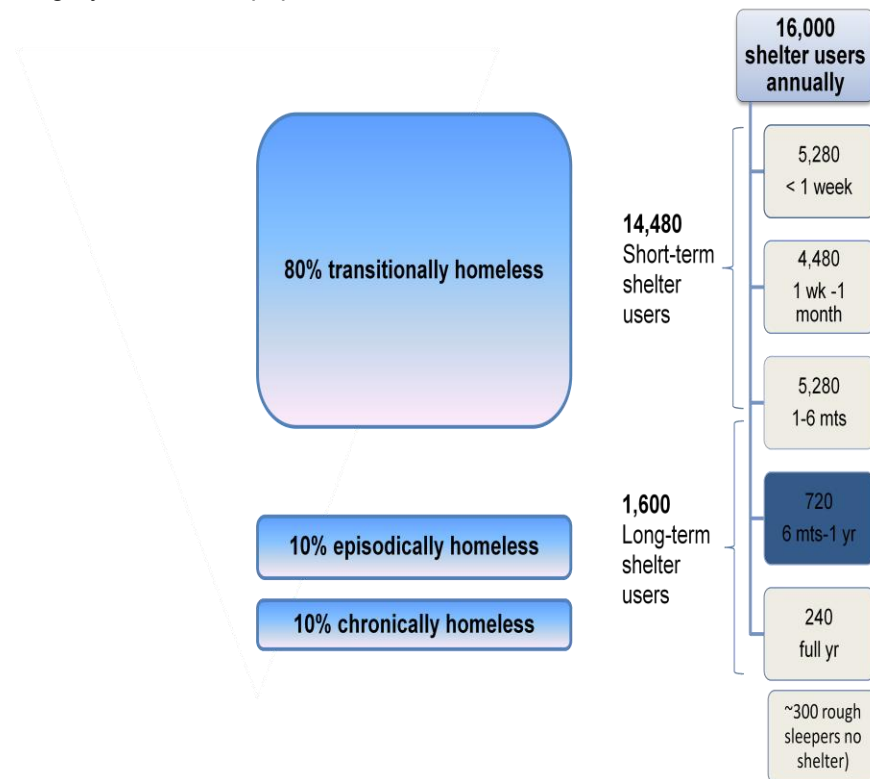
Is homelessness a problem in Calgary?

Yes. From 1994 to 2006, Calgary had Canada's fastest-growing population of people experiencing homelessness. By 2008, **4,060** people were counted as homeless by The City of Calgary.

In 2009, an estimated **15,000 to 17,000 people used a Calgary emergency shelter** for at least one night. For most people who experience it, homelessness is a short-term experience. Without the proper support, people can become homeless for months or even years.

What degrees of homelessness exist?

Using data from 220 U.S. cities, the Calgary Homeless Foundation estimates the following breakdown of Calgary's homeless population:



Transitionally homeless people are generally homeless for a short period of time, primarily economic reasons, and are best able to use existing programs to become re-housed. *Episodically homeless* people tend to have a number of episodes of homelessness over their lifetime, often related to addiction. *Chronically homeless* people are generally those who have been homeless for a long period of time and have at least one disabling condition (e.g. addiction, mental illness, physical illness). They appear to have lower rates of addiction than the episodically homeless, but significantly higher rates of mental illness. Both groups tend to be heavy consumers of public systems (e.g. police, corrections, hospital, and shelter).

Who is at risk of homelessness?

The CHF and The City of Calgary's Social Research Unit identified **23,165 households living in extreme poverty** (income less than \$20,000) and spending more than 50% of their income on shelter. Of those, **13,765** were renter households, which have a significantly higher risk than homeowners, who can sell their home to prevent homelessness.

Of the 13,765 renter households, notable characteristics included:

- **age** – 20% under 25 years old, with most (45%) between 25 and 44 years old (working age);
- **housing repairs** – 10% of housing was in need of major repairs;
- **children** – 20% had children (0.3 children/household on average);
- **immigrant** - recent immigrant for the primary head of household – 9.4% (1,290); and
- **Aboriginal** – Aboriginal head of household – 7.4% (1,030).

What population groups experience homelessness?

Members of any demographic can experience homelessness. In a survey, **14% of Albertans said they had experienced or come close to experiencing homelessness** (The Salvation Army Poverty Report, 2010). Given the right circumstances or series of events, homelessness could happen to anyone.

The following provides information and statistics on homelessness broken down by population. Updated statistics will be available once a Homeless Management Information System is in place system-wide (more information on the HMIS is available at www.calgaryhomeless.com – Info for Agencies).

Aboriginals

- Based on The City of Calgary's 2008 Homeless Count, Aboriginal people make up 15% of the homeless in Calgary. This is a disproportionately high number in comparison with Aboriginals represented in the general population (Aboriginals made up 2% of Calgary's population in the 2006 census).
- In a survey of chronically homeless individuals conducted by the Calgary Homeless Foundation in 2009, 28% were Aboriginal.
- In many instances, Aboriginal people face increased barriers to overcoming homelessness, including stereotyping and differing cultural needs. Recognizing this, the Calgary Homeless Foundation is working with the Aboriginal community to work Aboriginal-specific actions into the updated 10 Year Plan.

Youth

- 20% of Calgary's homeless are children and youth under age 24 (The City of Calgary, 2008 Homeless Count). Of this group, over half were minors.
- The numbers are thought to be higher, but tracking the actual number of youth who are homeless in Calgary is difficult due to their transient lifestyle and the temporary forms of shelter that many youth often locate, even though some also have children of their own.
- Based on the *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Report* (Worthington et. al, 2008):
 - 76% of youth living on the street reported being victims of violence (62% said they had shown violence to others);
 - 94% of youth on the street had recently used drugs or alcohol;
 - common factors leading to homelessness included: family violence and abuse, parents'/guardians' substance abuse and interaction with the child welfare system;
 - when asked, none of the youth interviewed wanted to stay on the street and 90% had goals of gaining better employment, having a family or finding housing.
- Youth have unique challenges to overcoming and preventing their homelessness, and often find themselves stuck between being too old for the child welfare system, while still too young to meet requirements for adult programs and support. With this in mind, the Calgary Homeless Foundation is working with agencies to build a 10 Year Plan to End Youth Homelessness. A draft of this Plan is available at www.calgaryhomeless.com – Research.

Families

- Families include couples, couples with one or more children or a lone adult with one or more children (The City of Calgary, 2008).
- In 2008, 197 families were counted as homeless by The City of Calgary. This number only included families counted by facilities – not the unknown homeless sleeping in their cars, at a friend's place or sometimes outside.
- Of all Calgary rental households, 13% are families with a gross annual income below \$44,000 and spending 30% or more of their income on housing – putting them at high risk for homelessness (The City of Calgary Research Summary #04, 2010).
- Families experiencing homelessness identified unaffordable rent costs, the need to flee from violence and health problems as primary reasons for their plight.
- A two-year milestone in Calgary's 10 Year Plan was to end family homelessness. Though the Calgary Homeless Foundation exceeded its two-year target of housing 200 families (220 families received housing and support), family homeless still exists. The Calgary Homeless Foundation and supporting community are re-doubling efforts to address family homelessness in 2010.

Men

- The City of Calgary's 2008 Homeless Count indicated that 78% of people experiencing homelessness are male.
- Many men who are homeless battle with addictions, mental health concerns and the challenge of finding affordable housing in Calgary's rental market.
- A Calgary Homeless Foundation survey taken at a Project Homeless Connect event in May 2010 indicated that 17% of men experiencing homelessness had part-time or full-time employment. Yet the issue of homelessness among men is not solved simply by finding employment, because their lack of housing prevents them from effectively managing their mental health, addictions and other issues that they face. This is why housing must be the first priority (read more about 'Housing First' at www.calgaryhomeless.com – The 10 Year Plan).

Women

- Nearly one quarter of people counted in the The City of Calgary's 2008 Homeless Count were female. However, it is likely that many more women are homeless or near-homeless and living with friends or family, or remaining in an abusive situation due to lack of alternatives.
- Fleeing domestic violence is one of the top reasons many women say they became homeless.
- The Calgary Homeless Foundation, in partnership with Discovery House and CUPS Rapid Exit, established Calgary's first housing and case management program for women and families fleeing domestic violence.

Seniors

- In a Calgary Homeless Foundation survey taken at a Project Homeless Connect event in May 2010, 3% of people experiencing homelessness were 65 or older, while the 2008 City of Calgary Homeless Count indicated 2% were seniors. Despite the relatively small percentage, due to increased vulnerability, this population must not be overlooked.
- Seniors needing to live in emergency shelters due to lack of alternatives are at risk of being victimized by crime or intimidation, and may receive inadequate services to accommodate their health issues.
- Seniors at risk of homelessness deal with difficulties in obtaining safe and accessible housing and maintaining it into the future.

Immigrants

- Homelessness can be particularly hard on the immigrant population, especially if they are from a country that does not speak English or French. They can encounter obstacles with finding affordable housing, becoming employed, understanding Canadian culture and learning their rights.
- Even for immigrants who do find housing, it is often unstable or does not meet their needs. The United Way's Hidden in Plain Sight Study (2009) found that 42% of immigrants to Calgary surveyed said they worried about housing most or all of the time.

- The same study showed that in other situations, housing costs resulted in families being divided. One participant explained, "I live in one bedroom with my two children in shelter. My other son is out with friends because there is no place for boys in the shelter. I need a place to live with all my children."

More information

At www.calgaryhomeless.com you can:

- Read real stories of people experiencing homelessness
- Learn about progress made with Calgary's 10 Year Plan
- View current research

Or join our online community!

- www.facebook.com/CalgaryHomeless
- www.twitter.com/timrichter
- www.youtube.com/homelessfoundation

If you have additional questions, please e-mail us at info@calgaryhomeless.com. Kayleigh Galpin, Communications Advisor, will respond to your e-mail or forward it to the appropriate Calgary Homeless Foundation staff member.