**Reduce emergency shelter use in Canada: New report measures housing affordability in 51 Canadian cities with rankings– offers solid solutions to policy-makers**

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It is important to distinguish between the reasons for homelessness. Recent studies show that the majority of Canadians who use emergency shelters are temporarily homeless because of economic circumstances, rather than chronically homeless due to personal issues.

Today, The School of Public Policy and authors Ron Kneebone and Margarita Wilkins released a new report measuring housing affordability in 51 Canadian cities and where cities rank in terms of the number of homeless shelter beds they provide. The report also offers an effective strategy for shrinking the need for shelter beds.

Across Canada in 2011, **15,493** permanent beds were available in **408** emergency shelters. The provision of emergency shelter beds varies widely across cities. Calgary, for example, provides more than twice as many beds per 100,000 people than does Vancouver or Toronto and more than four times the number provided in Montreal. The number of emergency beds provides an indication not only of the number of homeless people but it is also a measure of the local response to the issue.

According to Kneebone “­­­­We show that an effective strategy for shrinking the need for shelter beds is to provide improved income support to the very poor. Accounting for differences in climate, housing affordability, and demographics that may be associated with discrimination in housing markets, we show how a relatively modest increase in the incomes of those with very low incomes can shrink the need for emergency beds by nearly **20%**. We also show that a modest increase in rent subsidies would have a similar impact.”

The report highlights other policies that can prove effective such as those that reduce the cost of building housing which can be profitably rented at prices for individuals with low incomes. The wide range of policy choices means that all levels of government have a role to play in increasing the affordability of housing for those with low incomes. Recognizing the broad range of effective policy options is important because the causes of homelessness vary by city and so policymakers need to be flexible in their responses to the issue.

The paper can be downloaded at <http://www.policyschool.ucalgary.ca/?q=research>

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