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DISCERNING 'FUNCTIONAL AND ABSOLUTE ZERO': DEFINING AND MEASURING AN END TO HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA[†]

Alina Turner, Tom Albanese and Kyle Pakeman

SUMMARY

Several cities and regions have announced that they have “ended homelessness,” as this goal has become a major part of policy and community-based responses to homelessness. Yet, there are different ways to define what “ending homelessness” actually means. It is almost never meant in its most literal form, which would mean having every resident in a community sleeping in his or her own, secure home, on any given night. While that is certainly the ideal, and the goal we can work towards, it is simply not realistic in practice. People may find themselves homeless, at least temporarily. We need a meaningful and useful definition of “ending homelessness” that recognizes that reality, while pushing us towards an ideal situation.

This is the difference between a Functional Zero end to homelessness and an Absolute Zero end to homelessness. To the public, the words “ending homelessness” likely bring to mind a vision of someday when no person will ever experience homelessness, which is the ideal Absolute Zero concept, that is arguably unlikely to fully achieve. The goal of a Functional Zero end to homelessness, simplified, is to achieve a point where there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs them, and anyone who experiences homelessness does so only briefly, is rehoused successfully, and is unlikely to return to homelessness again.

[†] Special acknowledgements to Oxana Roudenko and Jesse Donaldson of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness for their support leading the consultation process to gather community feedback on the initial draft definition.

The two definitions do not stand in opposition to each other. Rather, communities should use the Functional Zero definition to get ever closer to the Absolute Zero definition, even if they can never fully reach it. It is critical, however, to clarify the differences between them and have clear definitions of each in order to provide communities with a framework to both achieve Functional Zero and aspire to Absolute Zero.

However, even within the concept of Functional Zero, there is much room for different visions. What constitutes a “brief” experience with homelessness, what constitutes “successful” rehousing, and the acceptable rate of unlikelihood for a return to homelessness will all be seen differently by different people, including those who have lived experience with homelessness. In order for us to properly set out to achieve Functional Zero (and aspire to Absolute Zero), it is crucial to specify what we mean and make it measurable, and consistent, so we can assess our progress.

Doing that will require the input of people who have lived experience with homelessness, who are often not consulted on strategy development. Their sense of what constitutes an “end to homelessness” might not quite be what academics, community workers and policy-makers expect, and it might also evolve over time. We can, and should, agree on specific and measurable definitions for a Functional Zero and an Absolute Zero end to homelessness, but we should not consider that the end of it. We must continue to develop and refine those definitions as we continue to consult with those who have lived experience with homelessness. They will bring an understanding to what it means to “end homelessness” that someone who has never experienced homelessness simply cannot.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of ending homelessness has increasingly shaped public-policy and community-based responses towards greater accountability and evidence-based decision-making. In recent years, communities have begun to “declare” that they have in fact achieved the goal of ending homelessness. New Orleans, for example, has publicly announced that it has ended veterans’ homelessness, while Medicine Hat, Alta. is gaining attention as “the first community to end chronic homelessness in Canada.”

Despite promising signs of progress from such communities, there is no internationally recognized definition of what an end to homelessness entails, what indicators and targets should be used in confirming such an achievement, or what the right process is for validating whether a community has indeed met its goal.

To this end, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), the University of Calgary School of Public Policy (SPP), and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) supported a collaborative process to develop a national definition of an “end to homelessness.” Also outlined through this process were critical measures needed to confirm an end to homelessness, and a proposed set of indicators based on a review of targets internationally and the on-the-ground experience of communities working in this direction.

Why Does a Common Definition Matter?

A common definition with measurable indicators will help us articulate what local systems aim to achieve in a consistent manner, allowing comparable analysis across jurisdictions and evidence-based assessment of policy implementation for government and funders. This will contribute to continuous quality improvement and enhanced performance towards common objectives, thereby informing investment decisions, system-gap analysis, and policy change. This can advance our goals around system integration with tangible metrics that can be applied outside the homelessness-prevention system as well.

The definition also serves as an articulation of our collective values, pointing us towards common goals. Importantly, it can help us address concerns and skepticism about “what it really means to end homelessness” encountered across stakeholder groups, including the public, media, politicians, service providers and those with lived experience. A common, measurable end to homelessness can demonstrate progress in a way that resonates across these groups and can help our efforts further.

Development Process

To develop this paper, the COH and The School of Public Policy worked to analyze the content of 60 existing plans and strategies in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Europe specific to defining an end to homelessness and any corresponding measures and indicators used. Interviews were also conducted as a small sample as a starting point for understanding the perspectives of those with lived experience.

TABLE 1 PLANS ANALYZED

Canada	28 municipal plans 7 provincial plans 1 national plan
U.S.	10 municipal plans 4 state plans 1 national plan
Australia	1 state plan 1 national plan
Europe	2 municipal plans 6 national plans

We also worked closely with U.S. colleagues from Abt Associates who are supporting Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) in moving in a similar direction toward developing a common conceptual framework for defining an end to homelessness.

The conceptual framework developed as result of this work was presented on a panel at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness in November 2015 to engage in dialogue with experts working on performance measurement in Canada and the U.S.; feedback obtained from the session was incorporated in an initial working paper.

Once the working paper was launched in May 2016, Dr. Alina Turner and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness team collaborated to develop and implement a fulsome consultation process that resulted in: 158 online survey responses, of which 42 were from people with lived experience; two virtual town halls, with 43 participants; and written responses to the proposed definition from the Government of Ontario, the Region of Waterloo, Edmonton Homeward Trust, and the Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. This final paper represents our thinking considering this feedback.

Key stakeholder groups consulted across Canada included:

- Funders and policy-makers;
- Service providers;
- Diverse individuals with lived experience;
- Public systems;
- Researchers.

In this final paper, consultations input into the ending homelessness definition are discussed and a revised framework for the definition is presented. Recommendation for implementation and testing in Canadian communities are also proposed.

FRAMING FUNCTIONAL AND ABSOLUTE ZERO

To begin, it is helpful to identify the two distinct approaches to defining an end to homelessness in the existing, primarily grey, literature. The “Functional Zero” approach describes the situation in a community where homelessness has become a manageable problem. That is, the availability of services and resources match or exceed the demand for them from the target population. Further, such resources are optimized, performing as intended with maximum efficacy. For example, a community might declare it has ended homelessness when it has enough supportive housing, shelter beds, service workers, and funds to assist the number of

people accessing the services. In economic terms, we can simplify this concept to refer to reaching a balance in supply-demand, or steady state.

The Functional Zero concept has some built-in flexibility allowing communities to custom tailor performance targets to local circumstances and priorities. It can be seen as being politically appealing because progress towards an end of homelessness is achievable and measurable, without completely eliminating all homelessness and homelessness risk. This recognizes that homelessness and risk cannot be completely eradicated, nor can efforts undermine personal choice in some instances. Someone might refuse the resources and supports offered for a variety of reasons, signalling independent and autonomous decision-making about what is best in his or her situation.

Functional Zero approaches rely on measures of demand (people coming forward for assistance) and methods of enumeration and estimating demand (point-in-time counts, shelter-utilization trends, etc.). In brief, Functional Zero is achieved when there are enough services, housing and shelter beds for everyone who needs them. Further, the experience of homelessness is brief and the system intervention results in successful resolution and few returns. In this approach, emergency shelters are meant to be temporary and the goal is permanent housing. While the focus on supports is to prevent homelessness to begin with, this might not always be possible and in such cases a system that is responsive and acts quickly is essential. A key aim of homelessness-prevention systems is to provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured. Of course, determining the breadth and depth of need in a community is often problematic. Certain sub-populations might not proactively seek out assistance (i.e., youth, women, people who use illicit drugs), and because of methodological issues, we currently lack a solid methodology to enumerate the at-risk and hidden homeless population.

Alternatively, an “Absolute Zero” approach to defining an end to homelessness would entail the complete eradication of homelessness within a community. As compared to a Functional Zero definition, which is a relative measurement of the state of homelessness, Absolute Zero would suggest that communities that reach this point have the same amount of homeless people: zero. Absolute Zero is closely aligned with what the public often assumes ending homelessness means: that is, the complete elimination of homelessness. In this sense, everyone would have access to the supports and housing needed to prevent them from being homeless in the first place.

The Absolute Zero approach benefits from being universal, setting a standard, across-the-board goal for all communities. The greatest barrier that prevents this approach from being widely adopted is that it is often seen as being unachievable or unrealistic; in fact, homelessness plans often acknowledge that bringing about an absolute end to homelessness is an ultimate, albeit, unrealistic goal.

While the nuances of these approaches to defining an end to homelessness are important, we should not consider Functional and Absolute Zero as binary opposites, or a choice we have to make. In fact, we can consider achieving Functional Zero as a step towards the vision of Absolute Zero, although the latter may be more aspirational and visionary. Thus, we can agree that, in the ideal world, we would completely eradicate all risk to ensure no one ever experiences homelessness again. While we move towards this vision, we can articulate and measure progress to adjust our strategies in real time. We need to move efforts towards this ultimate vision with tangible and achievable goals that can be verified and measured across diverse regions.

We recommend working towards Functional Zero as we progress towards Absolute Zero, rather than considering these concepts in opposition. Our definitions of Functional Zero and Absolute Zero are conceptualized as outlined below.



Rather than opposite concepts, Functional Zero describes progress towards an Absolute Zero end to homelessness

It is integral also to ensure that the definitions of both Absolute and Functional Zero are aligned with a common definition of homelessness. For the purposes of this paper, we use the Canadian Definition of Homelessness (see Appendix 4) published by the COH. This ensures that we apply the definitions of Absolute and Functional Zero across the various typologies of homelessness described (e.g., the hidden homeless).

Canadian Definition on Homelessness¹

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability to acquire it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual's/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a typology that includes:

- 1) **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
- 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
- 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure; and finally,
- 4) **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

¹ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Canadian Definition of Homelessness, Available online: <http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelesdefinition.pdf>.

CURRENT DEFINITIONS OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS

An understanding of Functional and Absolute Zero lays the foundation for a deeper investigation into how the end of homelessness is being defined in policies, plans, and legislation. Despite the Canadian focus of this paper, it is useful to look at international examples to allow for a comparison of definitions, and further contextualize the discussion. To do so, homelessness plans from the U.S., Australia, and several European countries were analyzed.

Methodology

To develop a detailed understanding of how the end of homelessness is being defined in Canada, a content analysis of readily accessible homelessness plans was conducted. It is important to note that we did not use a systematic approach to identifying the plans; plans were identified based on the communities featured in the “Community Profile” on the Homeless Hub website,² however some of the profiles were incomplete or dated so additional research was needed to find the most up-to-date plans. We aimed to review as many plans as possible across diverse jurisdictions until we saw consistent redundancy in the approaches.

In total, 28 municipal plans, seven provincial plans and the federal Homeless Partnership Strategy (HPS) were analyzed (see Appendix 1). Similarly, a content analysis was done for homelessness plans from the U.S. In total, 10 municipal plans, four state plans and the federal homelessness plan were analyzed. The majority of these plans were sourced from the National Alliance to End Homelessness Ten-Year Plan Database, which was compiled in 2010. Several of the municipal plans, specifically those of New Orleans, Salt Lake City, and Houston were intentionally picked because of recent reports that have indicated that these cities have ended veteran homelessness. It was anticipated that these plans might be distinct due to their supposed effectiveness. Other municipal plans were picked with the intention of creating a diverse sample, based on both the size of the community and its geography. State plans were selected to complement the municipal plans picked.

To gain an understanding of how the end of homelessness is being defined in European countries, a content analysis was done on seven national plans, along with one provincial plan, and two municipal plans. These plans were primarily sourced from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) website. Two plans from Australia were also included in the analysis. See Appendix 1 for a full listing.

The content analysis of all the aforementioned plans involved two steps: (1) looking for content that explicitly defines what ending homelessness means, and (2) looking for content that could implicitly define what the end of homelessness means: goals, targets, performance indicators, strategies and objectives.

Limitations

For the purpose of this research, the depth and breadth of the content analysis provides a scan of how ending homelessness is being defined. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the findings from the research may be limited. Firstly, not all homelessness plans across these

² Homeless Hub website, “Community Profiles,” <http://homelesshub.ca/CommunityProfiles>.

jurisdictions were analyzed; and secondly, the documents analyzed were those that were readily accessible online. In some instances, the researchers communicated with public officials to gain access to information when it was obvious that additional information existed but was not accessible online. It is likely, however, that other internal documents exist that could have provided greater insight into specific goals, targets, performance indicators, and objectives of the homelessness plans that were analyzed. Therefore, the conclusions drawn may be skewed because of undisclosed information that might have guided and might continue to guide internal operations.

Another issue encountered was the unavailability of goals, targets, performance indicators and objectives for certain communities due to ongoing development. For example, the Region of Durham had not yet developed its performance measurements to support the local plan because consultations were still underway to establish them. Finally, the analysis was limited to plans available in English.

Key Findings

The findings from the content analysis are organized by jurisdiction (Canada, the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand), with further detailing of approaches taken at specific levels of government. This is particularly important as community-level or municipal plans must be contextualized in national and regional (provincial/ state) approaches.

Canada

Due to the multi-tier nature of homelessness initiatives in Canada, it is necessary to look at all three levels of government to develop a comprehensive understanding of how exactly the end of homelessness is being defined.

The federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) supports 61 communities in local efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness. HPS makes no claim to a goal of ending homelessness; rather, it aims to "prevent and reduce homelessness across Canada."³ To measure whether or not progress is being made towards this goal, five key performance measures are used:

1. Decrease in the estimated number of shelter users who are chronically homeless;
2. Decrease in the estimated number of shelter users who are episodically homeless;
3. Decrease in the length of shelter stay;
4. Percentage of individuals placed in housing through a Housing First intervention who maintain housing; and
5. Amount invested by external partners for every dollar invested by the HPS.

In a document entitled "HPS Measurement" (see Appendix 2), the federal government expands upon the five key performance indicators and provides specific targets. For example, the document calls for a proposed reduction of 20 per cent for the estimated number of people living on the street (sleeping rough) by 2017/18. HPS left many targets blank, opting to let

³ Employment and Social Development Canada, "Terms and Conditions of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy" (2014), <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/funding/terms.shtml>.

communities set their own targets for performance measures, such as the number of days to move Housing First clients into permanent housing.

At the provincial level, there is very little consistency between the plans. Of the seven plans analyzed, only Alberta provided an explicit definition of what it means to end homelessness:⁴

“(Ending homelessness) will mean that even though there may still be emergency shelters available for those who become homeless, those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days.”

New Brunswick, while not providing an explicit definition, includes a vision for its homelessness framework that can be considered a quasi-definition of the end of homelessness:⁵

“New Brunswick (will be) a province where chronic homelessness does not exist because people who are homeless or who are at-risk of being homeless can access a range of housing options, in a timely manner, to meet their specific needs along with supports and services that are equitable, effective and delivered in a respectful and compassionate manner.”

The remaining provinces examined (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) either provided no discernable explicit or implicit definition or do not stipulate that ending homelessness is a goal. For example, while the province of Ontario, in its Housing Policy Statement,⁶ stated its explicit goal of ending homelessness, it provides very little clue as to what this actually means both in the policy statement and within other policy documents such as its Long Affordable Housing Strategy.⁷

Ontario’s Program Guidelines for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) includes two outcomes that point to its interpretation of progress towards ending homelessness: People experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing and people at risk of homelessness remain housed.⁸ Outside of this, however, the program guidelines do not specify goals or targets. Ontario has recently committed to implementing a number of recommendations from its Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, one of which is to set a target of ending chronic homelessness in 10 years.⁹

Based on municipal plans analyzed, there seems to be a smaller proportion that offers an explicit definition of what it means to end homelessness. Of those that do provide an explicit definition, the majority are found in Alberta, with both Red Deer and Medicine Hat laying out definitions, respectively:

⁴ Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, “A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years” (2008), 14, http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf.

⁵ New Brunswick Housing Corporation Department of Social Development, “Hope is a Home: New Brunswick’s Housing Strategy” (2010), 49, <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/sd-ds/pdf/Housing/housingstrategy-e.pdf>.

⁶ Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “Ontario Housing Policy Statement,” <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=9262>.

⁷ Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “Building Foundations: Building Futures – Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy” (2010), <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=8590>.

⁸ Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “Program Guidelines for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)” (2012), 16, <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=10065>.

⁹ Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, “Ontario Commits to Ending Chronic Homelessness in 10 Years,” press release, October 28, 2015, <http://news.ontario.ca/mah/en/2015/10/report-of-the-expert-advisory-panel-on-homelessness.html>.

“... we will be successful in ending homelessness in Red Deer when we have a system of care that can effectively and efficiently: (1) Prevent/divert vulnerable individuals from becoming homeless, or (2) Ensure those who are homeless have permanent, appropriate housing and the supports they require within 28 days of presenting for service within the system.”¹⁰

“An end to homelessness means that no one in our community will have to live in an emergency shelter or sleep rough for more than 10 days before they have access to stable housing and the supports needed to maintain it.”¹¹

Of the municipal plans analyzed in Ontario, only the City of Kingston provided an explicit idea of what ending homelessness would entail, using performance targets combined with some qualitative statements about the workings of the homelessness-prevention system:¹²

- No one is homeless for longer than 30 days;
- Chronic and repeated episodes of homelessness are the exception;
- The need for emergency shelters beds has been greatly reduced and shelter beds are an integral part of a housing system;
- There are sufficient units of housing — including permanent supportive housing — so that people who are homeless have a place to go;
- Housing and support workers rapidly respond as soon as (an) individual or family become(s) homeless;
- Services are integrated, and there is co-ordinated access and assessment across the homeless and housing crisis response system;
- Evidence-based practices have been adopted and service providers are constantly refin(ing) and improving their techniques based on new data.

An example from “A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024” illustrates the use of targets in lieu of an explicit definition:¹³

- Average length of stay (in) an emergency shelter is less than five days;
- A 20 per cent annual reduction in admissions to the emergency shelter; by the fifth year, total nights in shelter are at minimum levels;
- A 20 per cent increase in the affordable housing supply; Nipissing Housing Development Corporation has created 250 new affordable housing units for singles and seniors.

What becomes evident from the Canadian evidence, then, is that there are differences in how ending homelessness is defined. While some plans provide measures and targets focusing on the effectiveness and availability of homeless services and housing consistent with Functional

¹⁰ Red Deer and District Community Foundation, “EveryOne’s Home: Red Deer’s Five Year Plan to End Homelessness 2014 to 2018” (2014), <http://production.mhchs.ca/static/main-site/files/housing-development/Red-Deer-Plan.pdf>.

¹¹ Medicine Hat Housing Society, “At Home in Medicine Hat: Our Plan to End Homelessness – January 2014 Update” (2014), 10, <http://production.mhchs.ca/static/main-site/files/housing-development/Refocused-Plan-to-end-Homelessness.pdf>.

¹² City of Kingston, “10-Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan in the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac” (2013), 83, https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/13880/10Year_HousingHomelessness_Plan.pdf/2498b02e-6832-4250-95fc-6372b2bfc490.

¹³ District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board, “A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024” (2014), 58, [http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/A%20Place%20to%20Call%20Home%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/A%20Place%20to%20Call%20Home%20(FINAL).pdf).

Zero approaches, most nevertheless use these in the context of broader vision statements that align with the notion of Absolute Zero.

United States

In 2015, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) amended its “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness” with several important changes, one of which was the addition of an operational definition for an end to homelessness.¹⁴

The USICH notes that “an end to homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again. Changing economic realities, the unpredictability of life and unsafe or unwelcoming family environments may create situations where individuals, families, or youth could experience or be at-risk of homelessness.” USICH’s definition is broad and speaks to the qualities of a local homelessness-prevention system’s effectiveness and quality, rather than in terms of benchmarks and performance indicators. This again assumes a Functional Zero approach focused on aspects of effectiveness of the homelessness-prevention system.

USICH Definition of Ending Homelessness¹⁵

An end to homelessness means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

Specifically, every community will have the capacity to:

- Quickly identify and engage people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness;
- Intervene to prevent the loss of housing and divert people from entering the homelessness services system;
- Provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services, without barriers to entry, while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are being secured.
- When homelessness does occur, quickly connect people to housing assistance and services — tailored to their unique needs and strengths — to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

More recently, the focus on veteran homelessness in the U.S. has prompted Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to become increasingly explicit about their criteria to confirm a community has indeed ended veteran homelessness. These definitions include specific, measurable benchmarks that would be verified to confirm the community has indeed achieved the goal. As of October 2016, 32 communities and three states have been confirmed by USICH, HUD and VA as having ended veteran homelessness.

USICH also recently published its criteria and benchmark for ending chronic homelessness. In the U.S., federal criteria and benchmarks are now starting to be incorporated into federal program-funding requirements. This demonstrates that once a consistent definition is established, tested and starts to be achieved, funders and policy-makers can use the

¹⁴ United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness” (2015), 10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁵ United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness” (2015), 10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf.

definition to further promulgate certain practices that are consistent with, or directly support the achievement of the definition. In the U.S., this shift is specifically going to require that approximately 400 grantees: adhere to rapid-rehousing practice standards published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness; engage in community planning with local partners; support or directly lead efforts to create co-ordinated entry processes across the system; and develop low-barrier shelter options, comprehensive outreach, etc. Applicants for the 2017 fiscal year must certify they practice or support these approaches to be competitive.

U.S. Criteria for Ending Veteran Homelessness¹⁶

1. The community has identified all veterans experiencing homelessness.
2. The community provides shelter immediately to any veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.
3. The community only provides service-intensive transitional housing in limited instances.
4. The community has capacity to assist veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing.
5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place should any veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.

U.S. Benchmarks for Ending Veteran Homelessness

1. Chronic homelessness among veterans has been ended.

- No Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, with (the) exception of (1) any Veterans identified, offered permanent housing intervention, but not yet accepted or entered housing, and (2) any Veterans offered permanent housing intervention but chose service-intensive transitional housing prior to permanent housing.
- Continued outreach to Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness that have not yet accepted (a) permanent housing intervention offer.
- Continue to offer permanent housing intervention at least once every two weeks.

2. Veterans have quick access to permanent housing.

- Average time identification to permanent housing entry 90 days or less among all Vets who entered permanent housing in past three months.
- Two exceptions/exclusions: (1) Veterans identified and offered permanent housing intervention, but (have) not initially accepted (an) offer, average only includes time from permanent housing intervention acceptance until permanent housing move-in, and (2) Veterans offered permanent housing intervention but chose to enter service-intensive transitional housing prior to moving to permanent housing.
- Should also take into account, and may need to be tailored based on, local housing market conditions.

3. The community has sufficient permanent housing capacity.

- Number of Veterans moving into permanent housing is greater than or equal to number entering homelessness during continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement.

4. The community is committed to housing first and provides service-intensive transitional housing to veterans experiencing homelessness only in limited instances.

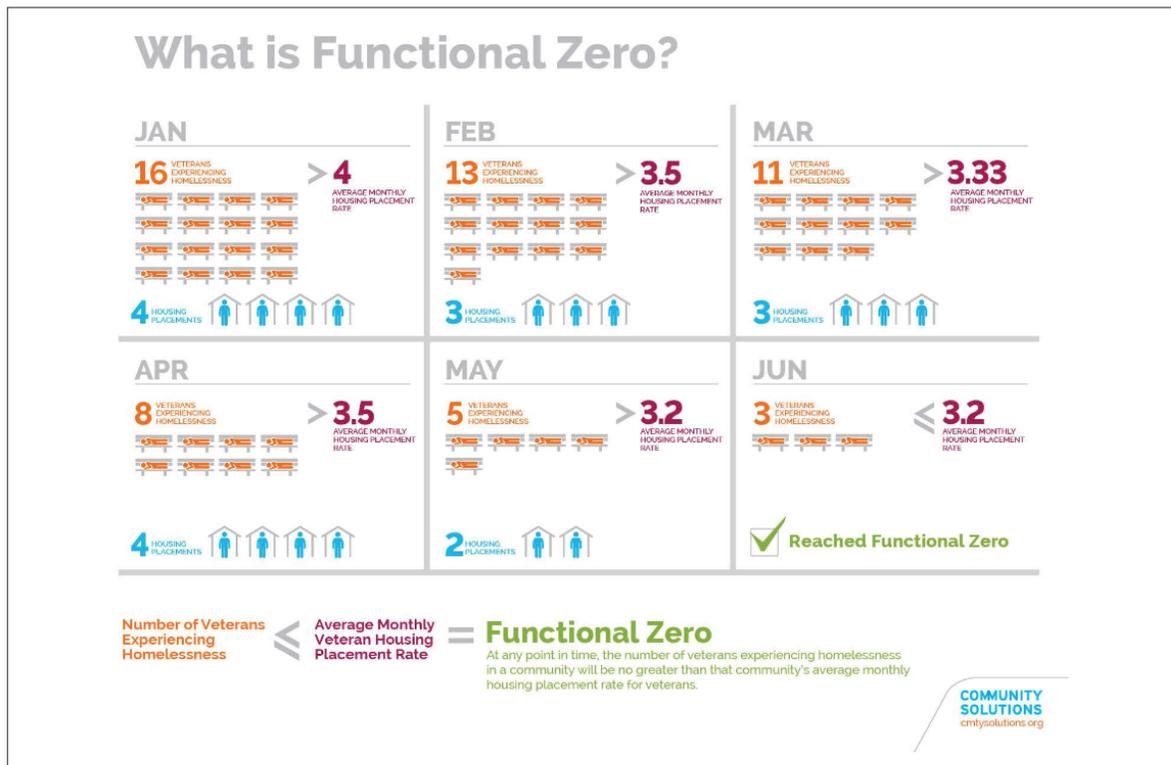
- Number of Veterans entering service-intensive transitional housing is less than (the) number entering homelessness during continuous 90-day period preceding benchmark measurement.

¹⁶ The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, "Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks" (2015), https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Achieving_the_Goal_Ending_Veteran_Homelessness_v3_10_01_15.pdf.

Ending homelessness, then, would mean that a community has effectively structured its local homelessness-prevention system to meet incoming demand with effectiveness and efficiency and has an adequate supply of housing to meet the demands. An illustrative example comes from Community Solutions ‘Built for Zero’ campaign, which defines Functional Zero for ending chronic and veterans’ homelessness as having been achieved when:¹⁷

“At any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in a community will be no greater than the average monthly housing-placement rate for veterans experiencing homelessness in that community.”

FIGURE 1 COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS BUILD FOR ZERO CAMPAIGN - FUNCTIONAL ZERO DEFINITION



The four U.S state-level homelessness plans analyzed all stated their goal is to end homelessness, although the objectives included were frequently broad and did not delve into implementation details or specify targets and performance measures. At the local level, some plans provide more concrete examples of how an end to homelessness is defined. For example, Seattle/King County’s plan lays out expectations that by the end of 2014:¹⁸

- Homelessness will be virtually ended;
- People who enter into homelessness will have immediate access to housing with appropriate supports;

¹⁷ Community Solutions, “What Does It Mean to End (and Prove You’ve Ended) Veteran Homelessness?” (2016), <https://cmtysolutions.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-end-and-prove-you%E2%80%99ve-ended-veteran-homelessness>.

¹⁸ Committee to End Homelessness King County, “A Roof Over Every Bed in King County: Our Community’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness” (2005), 3-4, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/Local-Plan-King-Plan.pdf>.

- Downsized outreach and emergency services will continue to aid individuals and families who become homeless, but stays in the system will be short; and
- There will be no need for tent cities or encampments.

The majority of the local 10-year plans include specific goals, targets, and performance measures. However, these targets range in their level of specificity. As a result, some of the targets provide little indication of what outcomes the community will deem as a success. For example, as a part of Oakland County, Calif.'s plan, there is a specific focus on family homelessness:

“The length of homelessness experienced by families will be reduced through prompt, effective, and respectful response, delivered by a continuum of providers dictated by family needs.”¹⁹

Even in communities recognized for making progress in reducing homelessness, such as Salt Lake City, plans often feature vague targets, making it difficult to determine what their benchmark for success is and therefore their definition of ending homelessness. For example, under Salt Lake City's housing strategy, the plan stipulates that the goal is to:²⁰

“Provid(e) suitable housing surrounded by appropriate supportive services (to) help meet the basic human need of shelter.”

To accomplish this, several steps are laid out, such as increasing housing opportunities, the number of housing units for the chronically homeless, and the number of housing vouchers and subsidies. This, once again, leaves us wondering what exactly constitutes an increase in these supports, and how much of an increase is ideal. However, despite this, Salt Lake City's plan does include specific targets in some instances. For example, the plan indicates that one important step is to rapidly rehouse first-time shelter users within 90 days of their becoming homeless. The plan also includes clear-cut goals for reducing homelessness, which was not seen in many of the plans analyzed:

“The goal is to reduce the number of homeless persons on the street by 25 percent in five years, 50 percent in eight years and by 95 percent in 10 years.”²¹

As in the case of Canadian plans, what becomes evident from the U.S. analysis is that diverse approaches and measures to defining an end to homelessness are used despite recent efforts nationally to create consistency. In a study by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, which looked into content patterns between community plans to end homelessness, it was found that only 18 per cent of plans included numeric outcomes. The study concluded that “it remains to be seen how successful 10-year plans will be without these key implementation elements.”²²

¹⁹ Oakland County Taskforce on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, “Mission Possible: Oakland County's Community Plan to End Homelessness” (2006), 8, http://www.thecampaigntoendhomelessness.org/Portals/0/pdfs/10YrPln_Reg8_OaklandCo.pdf.

²⁰ Salt Lake County Council of Governments, “New Vision New Opportunities: Salt Lake County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness” (2006), 13, <http://www.slco.org/crd/pdf/TenYearPlanToEndChro.pdf>.

²¹ *ibid.*, 12.

²² National Alliance to End Homelessness, “A Shifting Focus: What's New in Community Plans to End Homelessness” (2009), 4, http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/8fb05553670fae3f64_9km6ibuf7.pdf.

Europe

Unlike their North American counterparts, European plans are not as explicitly focused on ending homelessness; rather, most propose reducing homelessness and social exclusion. In most cases the goals, targets, performance indicators, and objectives set out are also focused on the homelessness-prevention system's response, with some additional focus on discharging practices from public systems.

Denmark's plan to reduce homelessness sets out four objectives:²³

- No citizen should live a life on the street;
- Young people should not stay at care homes, but must be offered alternative solutions;
- Periods of accommodation in care home or shelter should last no longer than three to four months for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support; and
- Release from prison or discharge from courses of treatment or hospitals must presuppose that an accommodation solution is in place.

Denmark's plan opts to let municipalities set their own goals, in a manner similar to Canada and the U.S. insofar as municipalities have significant control over determining specific goals and targets for addressing homelessness. For example, as outlined in the national plan, Copenhagen and Aarhus have different targets for the goal that "no citizen should live a life on the street": a 60-per-cent and 85-per-cent reduction in street homelessness by 2012, respectively.

Norway's homelessness plan seeks to prevent and combat homelessness via three primary objectives and five targets:²⁴

1. Combat Homelessness
 - a) The number of eviction notices shall be reduced by 50 per cent and the number of evictions by 30 per cent.
 - b) No one shall have to spend time in temporary accommodation upon release from prison.
 - c) No one shall have to spend time in temporary accommodation upon discharge from an institution.
2. Help improve the quality of overnight shelters
 - a) No one shall be offered overnight shelter without a quality agreement.
3. Help the homeless to quickly obtain an offer of long-term housing
 - a) No one shall stay more than three months in temporary accommodation provisions.

²³ Ministry of Interior and Social Affairs, "The Government's Homelessness Strategy: A Strategy to Reduce Homelessness in Denmark 2009-2012" (2009), 6, <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143>.

²⁴ Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, "The Pathway to a Permanent Home: Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness" (2006), 5, <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143>.

Norway, like Denmark, gives municipalities a significant degree of autonomy to determine their goals and strategies. The national plan does outline six strategies that are essential to reducing homelessness:²⁵

1. Eviction prevention;
2. Create a pathway to housing for released convicts;
3. Create a pathway to housing for people released from “treatment institutions”;
4. Ensure higher quality of overnight stays for those who need temporary accommodation;
5. Help the homeless to quickly secure housing of their own; and
6. Developing an overview of the scope of homelessness.

England stands out among the pack of European countries for its explicit goal to end all rough sleeping, as laid out in its “Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide.” Six priority areas (“commitments”) are outlined in the plan with the aim of ensuring that those “who do spend a night sleeping rough anywhere in the country (are) immediately helped off the streets.”²⁶

- Commitment 1: Helping people off the streets;
- Commitment 2: Helping people to access health care;
- Commitment 3: Helping people into work;
- Commitment 4: Reducing bureaucratic burdens;
- Commitment 5: Increasing local over investment in services; and
- Commitment 6: Devolving responsibility for tackling homelessness.

Ireland’s homeless plan, “The Way Home,” offers a vision to:²⁷

- Eliminate long-term homelessness (i.e., the occupation of emergency accommodation for longer than six months) and the need for people to sleep rough;
- Minimize the risk of a person becoming homeless through effective preventative policies and services; and
- Ensure that when homelessness does occur it is short term and that people who are homeless are assisted into appropriate long-term housing

This vision represents the only instance where there is a hybrid definition. That is, where both a functional and an absolute approach to ending homelessness is present in a single plan. This becomes clearer when the plan outlines the six strategic aims that include concerns about the effectiveness of the homeless-service system and the desire to outright eliminate rough sleeping and long-term homelessness.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ United Kingdom. Department for Communities and Local Government, “Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide” (2011), 9-11, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf.

²⁷ Ireland. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, “The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013” (2008), <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,18192,en.pdf>.

Australia

In 2008, the Australian government created a plan to reduce homelessness across the country. The long-term goals, as stated in “The Road Home — A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness,” are to halve overall homelessness and offer support accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.²⁸

Notwithstanding the fact that Australia’s goal is to reduce homelessness rather than end it, it is evident that its plan’s primary concern is to create a more effective homelessness-prevention system. This is perhaps best demonstrated through the plan’s three overarching strategies:

1. *Turning off the tap:* Services will intervene early to prevent homelessness;
2. *Improving and expanding services:* Services will be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for their clients; and
3. *Breaking the cycle:* People who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

A similar concern for the effectiveness of the homelessness system is also seen in Australia’s New South Wales plan.²⁹ In fact, the plan adopts the three aforementioned strategies outlined in the national plan.

Discussion

As is evident from the analysis above, most documents reviewed developed implicit definitions of ending homelessness, with little consistency across jurisdictions. Often, an implied definition of homelessness following the Functional Zero approach was found in the use of targets, benchmarks or other performance measures that define progress. Quantitative goals, indicators, and targets outlined focused on measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of local homeless systems in addressing and reducing defined levels of need. At the same time, these were blended or co-presented with Absolute Zero concepts that provided aspirational goals, vision statements or descriptions of the desired end-state of these efforts.

The most commonly cited measures concerned:

- Number of program and housing units available against estimated demand.
- Length of stay in shelter/street.
- Time between identification or “registry” and placement in housing.
- Numbers of homeless persons (point-in-time count, annual shelter /transitional housing utilization).
- Per cent who successfully exit to permanent housing.
- Per cent of those rehoused who return to homelessness.
- Number of net new homeless in system from at-risk population.
- Housing-retention rates among rehoused clients.

²⁸ Australia. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, “The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness” (2008), 17, http://www.cshisc.com.au/media/150400/the_road_home.pdf.

²⁹ Australia. New South Wales, Ministry of Housing, “A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW” (2009), http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/324704/NSWHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf.

In a small number of cases, communities provided explicit definitions typically focused on one or two specific measures, such as length of stay in shelter (e.g., Medicine Hat, Alta., Red Deer, Alta., and Calgary). Other efforts of defining an end to homelessness articulated a broad vision, aspirational state, and values describing the characteristics of the ideal state of the local system response.

In the absence of consistent definitions, most documents offered a range of performance indicators to describe progress, although there was little consistency with regard to specific targets and goals. For example, plans did not have aligned targets for the maximum length of time someone can be homeless for. In addition, there was also a range in the targets. Ottawa, for example, has indicated its goal of reducing emergency-shelter stays to 30 days or less. In comparison, Edmonton outlined in its plan the ambition to reduce the average length of emergency-shelter stays to seven days or fewer.

Reflecting on the few explicit definitions of ending homelessness and the implicit definitions crafted through the goals, targets, performance indicators and objectives of homelessness plans, it is apparent that *all* plans have adopted some version of an Functional Zero definition. That is to say, no plan claims to fully and permanently end all homelessness even if this might be an aspirational goal. Rather, plans aim to create a system that is effective and efficient in addressing homelessness as they work towards Absolute Zero.

An important implied assumption across these definitions and their complementing measures is that the focus of our efforts is on effectively managing the supply-demand dynamic of the local homelessness-prevention system itself. In other words, an end to homelessness is coterminous with the effective performance of local services, balancing client needs with quality and efficient responses. The measures proposed track the flow into the homeless system and its capacity to respond to shifting demand with diverse interventions (prevention, emergency shelter, outreach, Housing First, etc.). They further focus on the workings of the homelessness-prevention system itself and how quickly it is able to assess clients for appropriate intervention, move them into housing with supports, and to what longer-term effect. In a number of jurisdictions, the goal of increasing the supply of affordable housing is included in plans to address homelessness, although in practice there are challenges ensuring an aligned approach is in place between the homeless-serving and social-housing systems where they are not integrated.

While there is nothing wrong per se with these approaches, making it the sole foundation behind a national definition would fall short on several fronts, which becomes particularly evident when we look to the perspectives of those with lived experience.

THE LIVED-EXPERIENCE LENS

As mentioned, interviews with a small sample (n=6) of persons with lived experience were conducted to gauge perspectives on the notion of ending homelessness and common definitions used in current initiatives (See Appendix 3 for the interview guide). Ethics clearance was obtained from the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee (HPRC) at York University. These interviews were used to develop a lived experience survey however to gain further insight once the initial working paper was developed. To this end, 42 surveys were completed during the consultation process by people with lived experience, using questions consistent with those that were used in the interviews.

By no means are these findings exhaustive or representative of the diversity of those with lived experience; rather, the intent was to gauge possible issues and emerging directions that could be expanded in a broader consultation on defining an end to homelessness.

Interview Methods and Limitations

With the assistance of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, persons with lived experience were identified and contacted to inquire about participating in an interview. In total, 11 persons with lived experience were contacted, and of those, six were ultimately interviewed. All interviews were less than an hour long and questions were designed to capture what participants thought the end of homelessness means both for themselves specifically, and more broadly (e.g., within Canada). However, due to the semi-structured format of the interviews, the questions asked — while similar in content — often differed in both delivery and wording. To ensure the integrity of the notes, each interview was captured via audio recording and transcribed.

The table below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants to further contextualize findings. Note that none of the interviewees were homeless at the time of the interviews; a range of past homelessness experience was reported.

TABLE 2 INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic Characteristics	No. of Participants (n=6)
Age (at time of interview)	--
< 18	0
> 18	6
Gender	---
Male	2
Female	3
Other	1
Cumulative duration of homelessness	--
Less than 1 year	2
Between 1 year and 3 years	1
Greater than 3 years	3

The results of the interviews have several methodological limitations. The first is that, due to the small sample, the findings are not representative of the entire homeless population. Most notable is the absence of homeless youth from the survey, although two participants had experienced homelessness as adolescents. A second methodological limitation is that all participants, to a greater or lesser extent, are involved in some form of homelessness work, whether it be advocacy, consultation, or working in the field. This could further skew findings, because those without specialized knowledge were not included in the interviews. Despite these limitations, the findings are still important as they contextualize the conversation around ending homelessness.

Interview Themes

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to deduce recurring patterns. Quotes that particularly highlighted the theme were used to provide a richer understanding of

participant perspectives. In order to determine whether the findings were in fact main themes, these were tested between the two researchers. For the purposes of this working paper, we are highlighting the themes relevant to how participants defined an end to homelessness from their perspective.

Primarily, the interviewees highlighted that access to accessible, secure, and affordable housing was essential to ending homelessness at a personal and broader social level. Secondly, they stressed that ending homelessness is more than housing solutions, as efforts are needed to reduce social exclusion and ensure those with lived experience are part of inclusive communities.

Accessible, secure, and affordable housing.

When asked “What would Canada look like when we have ended homelessness?” or a variation thereof, all of the participants stressed the need for affordable and social housing. A key element that interviewees considered as crucial to ending homelessness was that homeless persons both are, and feel, a sense of tenure and stability in their housing situation. Moreover, participants mentioned that financial sustainability (e.g., being able to afford their housing) was important to changing feelings about the precariousness of their housing situation.

Five of the six participants stressed that feelings of insecurity in or around their house could prevent them from feeling like they have a permanent home. For example, one participant disclosed having to leave an apartment because the participant did not feel safe due to a conflict with a neighbour (Participant 1).

Q: What do you think ending homelessness means?

Wayne: A home to me is ... 1. A place in which I can entertain family and friends, consisting of a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. 2. A secure, safe place without fear of having to move. And 3. A(n) affordable place, that reflects my income support for shelter allowance.

Q: When did you no longer consider yourself homeless?

Margret: When I got a safe apartment ... when I knew I could go to my door without getting attacked.

The accessibility and suitability of housing was an issue that was brought up by several participants. If a housing unit is either inaccessible or unsuitable, then persons inhabiting those units will not feel like their homelessness has ended.

More than housing.

Three of the participants described the degree to which people are able to have a sense of control over their housing. As one participant (Participant 3) put it, the level of surveillance and restrictions placed on prior homeless persons can damage their sense of community as they face the decision between community (e.g., friends) and social isolation. As a consequence, some leave their housing to return to the streets.

Q: What are your thoughts on typical performance indicators and targets, such as the swiftness of rehousing?

Alice: ... (I) f it is just about getting people into a place where there are walls, then ... it's not going to make a lot of difference. (People) are going to keep going back out (into homelessness) because there has to be community building.

Several participants (four) described homelessness in relation to social exclusion, marked by marginalization on a variety of levels (e.g., culturally, technologically, socially, etc.). Without resolving social exclusion, as one participant (Participant 6) proposes, homelessness will never be eliminated.

Q: So for yourself, does ending homelessness mean that everyone has a house? Or it is more than housing?

Janice: To me it's more than housing because a lot of people struggle with abuse backgrounds, which causes them to commit crimes and feel unsafe in their own place. So if we take care of underlying issues — whether it's abuse or mental health issues, addictions — then we can actually get towards better housing and ending homelessness.

What is evident, albeit in a limited sense, from these interviews is that those with lived experience do not define an end to homelessness in terms of targets and performance measures. In some ways, this is obvious; they look to their experience and that of their social networks to develop an understanding of what an end to homelessness would mean to them personally. Yet, to date, our approaches to defining an end to homelessness have often excluded such perspectives. What use is building an effective homelessness-prevention system — with lengths of stay in shelter of fewer than 30 or 21 or seven days — if those we serve nevertheless report that we have not ended their homelessness? There has to be congruence between the indicators we measure and the lived-experience perspective.

As previously mentioned, further consultations with individuals with lived experience are needed to confirm their perspectives on the proposed definition, with diverse backgrounds across age, gender, family composition, ethnicity, sexual orientation, regions, etc.

Lived-Experience Survey Input

Of the 42 survey respondents, 22 had only partially completed the survey — although input was still used on a per question basis. Most responses were from individuals residing in Canada and three were from the U.S. Of those from Canada, most were from Ontario (nine). Six were from B.C., two were from Alberta, and one was from Manitoba. All of the respondents, except one individual who declined to answer, were over 18 years old. Of this group, 58 per cent identified as female and 38 per cent identified as male. Two individuals identified as indigenous. Half indicated that they experienced cumulative homelessness for between one and three years.

Responses to what “ending homelessness” means referred to: affordable (three participants), stable (two participants), safe (five participants) and decent housing (one participant). Two participants referred to having measures in place that would prevent people from falling into homelessness.

These samples are consistent with the input from the interviews:

Survey Respondent: “It means everyone having immediate access to somewhere safe to go if they find themselves without a place to sleep that night. After accessing that safe place, ending homelessness would mean that person/family would get immediate access to resources that would assist them in re-housing within a timely manner. Supports would be in place to ensure housing was sustainable & preventative interventions were utilized.”

Survey Respondent: "... People want to feel like they belong and that they are cared about and that someone understands them. They want to feel like they have recognizable and recognized capabilities and that they have value as citizens of the universe"

Having a stable place to live was mentioned on three occasions when participants were asked when they felt like they were no longer homeless. Some other answers included:

"... when I felt like I was safe and had some confidence that I could maintain my own safety..."

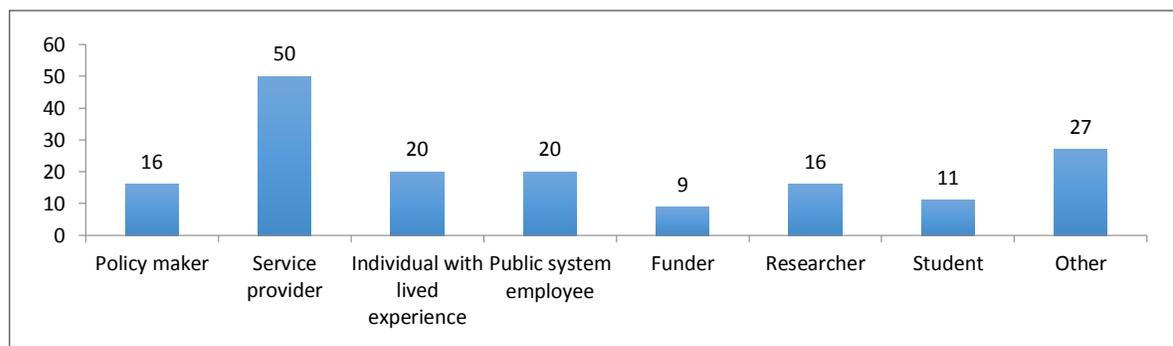
"When I finally was hired for a full-time position and was able to afford to rent, to cook for myself and to make decisions based on my needs (and not on a government policy)."

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION RESULTS

To complement the engagement with people with lived experience and test the concepts presented in the initial working paper two virtual town halls also held and facilitated by Dr. Alina Turner with a total of 43 participants. In addition, an online survey with 116 responses was also used to seek feedback.

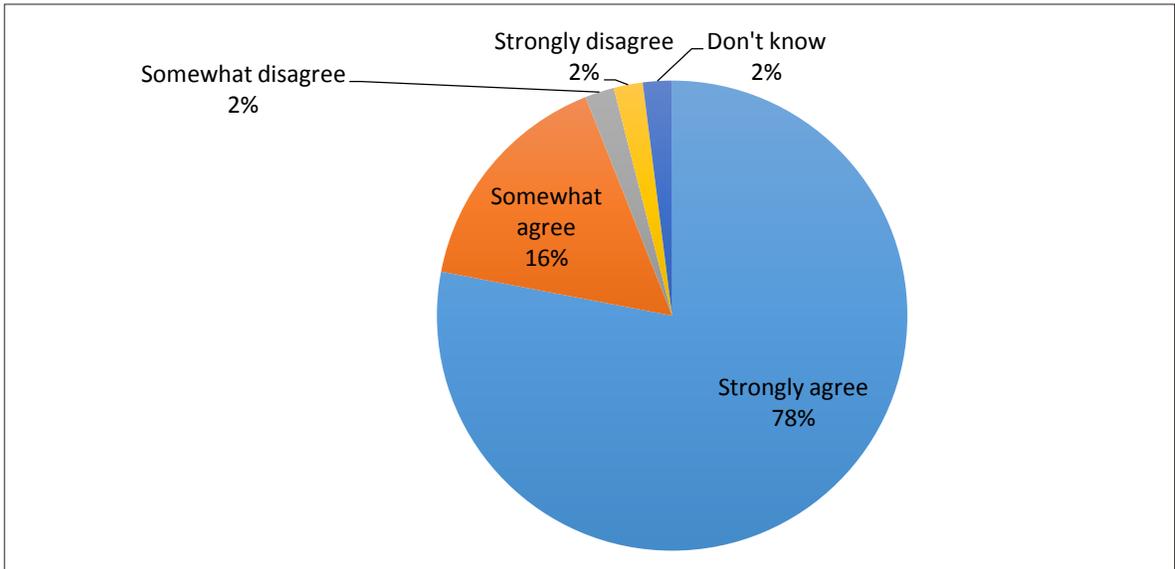
We will summarize general trends and then delve further into key themes from written responses in the survey and the town hall discussions. The survey had 113 responses from Canada, one from Australia and two from the U.S. Of those from Canada, most were from Ontario (56). The rest were from B.C. (25), Alberta (15), Manitoba (eight), Saskatchewan (three), Quebec (two), Newfoundland (two), Nova Scotia (one) and New Brunswick (one). A list of the cities represented can be found below. From those respondents that indicated their role, most were service providers (50) or selected the "other" category (27). The "other" category most commonly included volunteers, advocates and activists.

FIGURE 2 SURVEY RESPONDERS



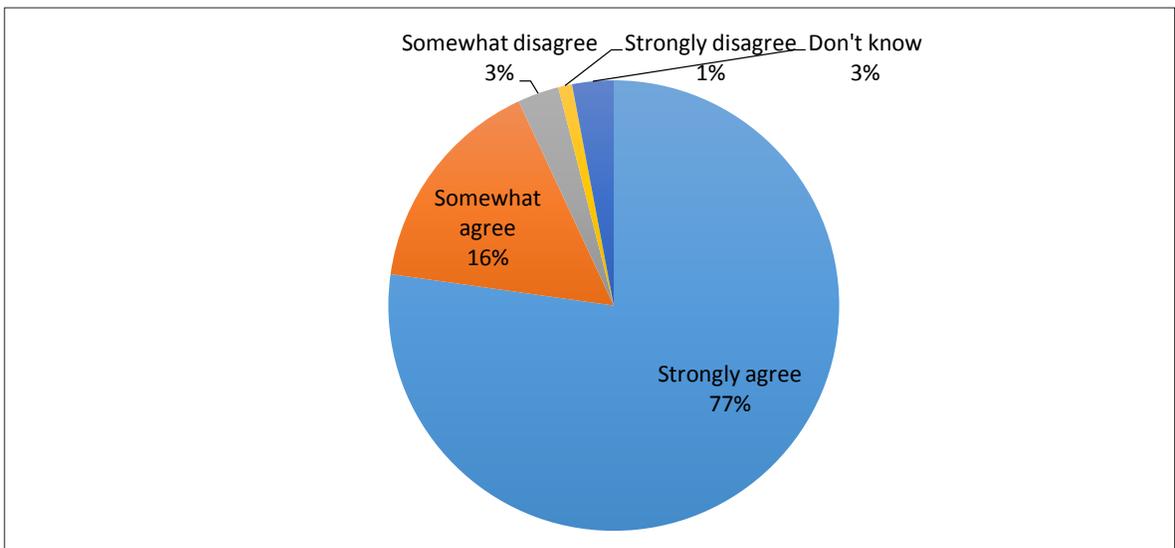
When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Canada should strive towards a consistent definition of Functional Zero" a large majority (94 per cent) somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

FIGURE 3 RESPONSES TO “CANADA SHOULD STRIVE TOWARDS A CONSISTENT DEFINITION OF FUNCTIONAL ZERO”



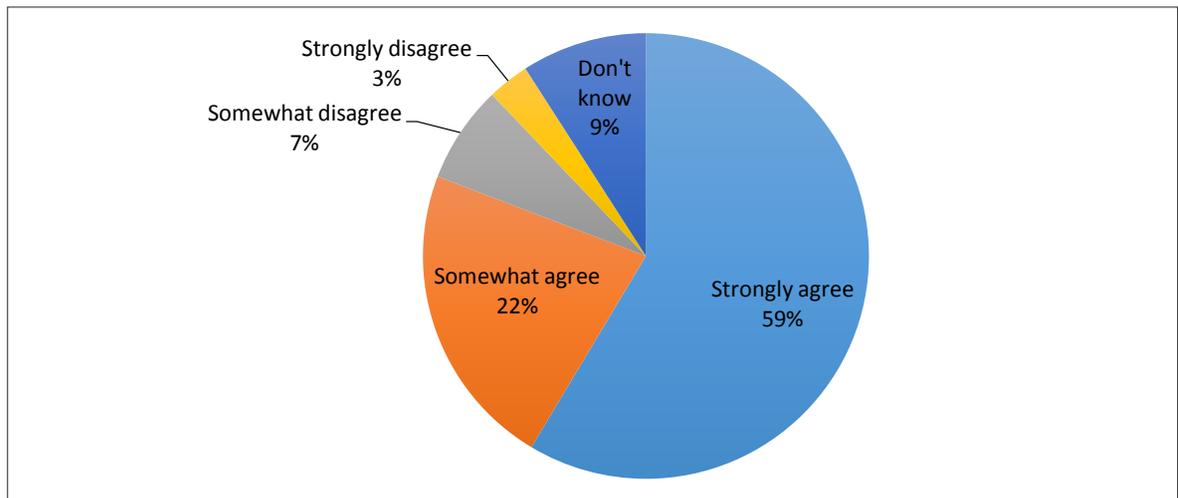
Most somewhat or strongly agreed (93 per cent combined) with the statement: “A consistent definition of Functional Zero can improve my community’s response to homelessness.”

FIGURE 4 RESPONSES TO “A CONSISTENT DEFINITION OF FUNCTIONAL ZERO CAN IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY’S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS.”



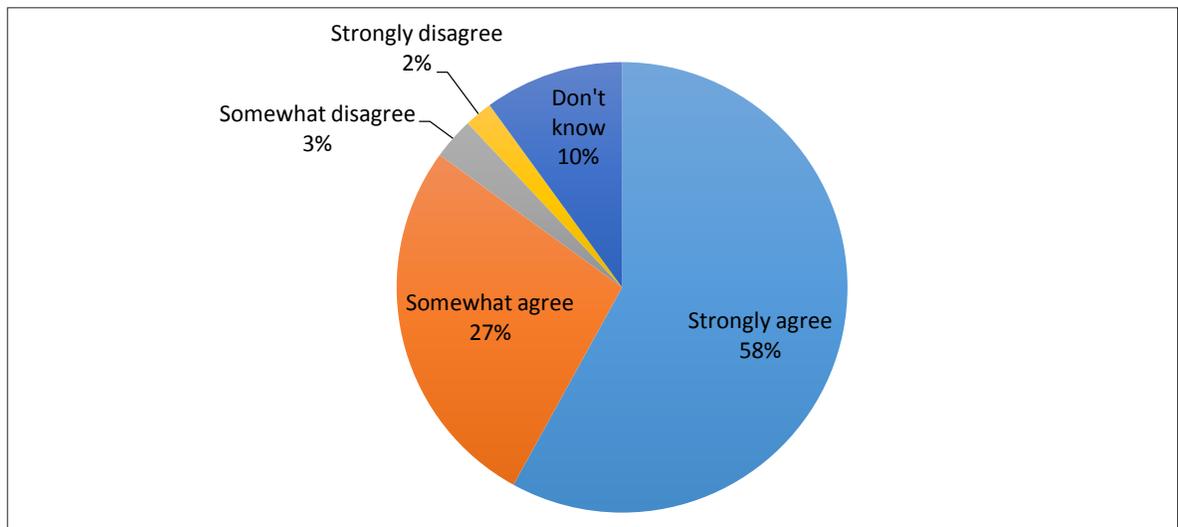
Most somewhat or strongly agreed (81 per cent combined) that, “The proposed three dimensions — lived experience, homelessness-prevention systems and public systems — are adequate to capture a definition of ending homelessness.”

FIGURE 5 RESPONSES TO “THE PROPOSED THREE DIMENSIONS – LIVED EXPERIENCE, HOMELESSNESS-PREVENTION SYSTEMS AND PUBLIC SYSTEMS – ARE ADEQUATE TO CAPTURE A DEFINITION OF ENDING HOMELESSNESS.”



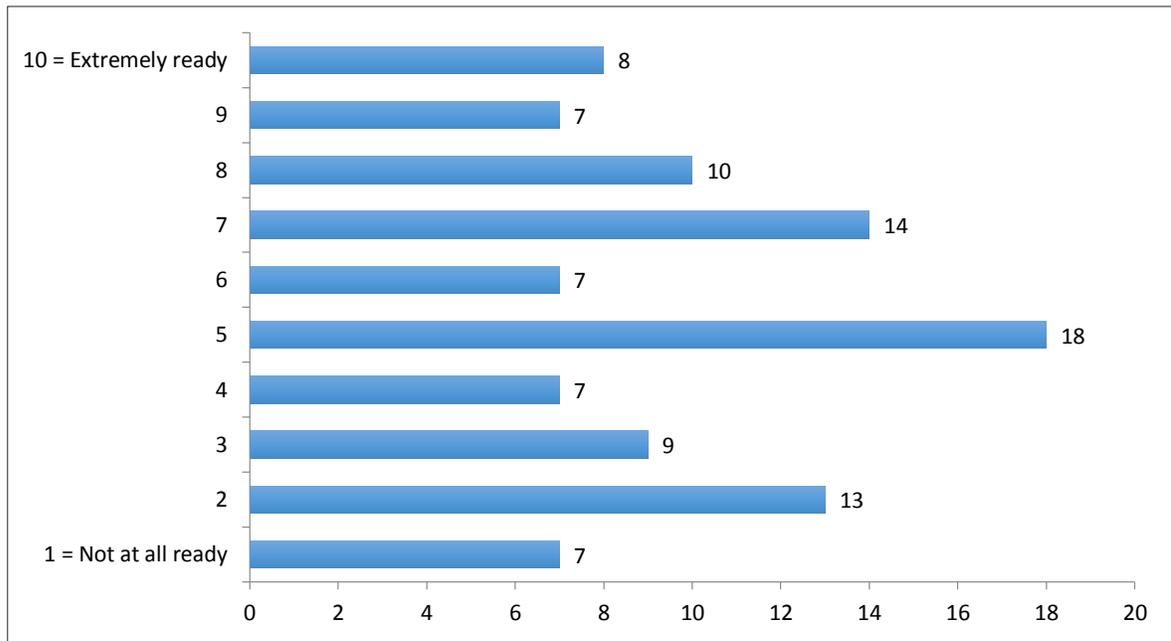
Most somewhat or strongly agreed that, “The proposed standards and performance measures adequately capture a practical and robust definition of Functional Zero” (85 per cent combined).

FIGURE 6 RESPONSES TO “THE PROPOSED STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES ADEQUATELY CAPTURE A PRACTICAL AND ROBUST DEFINITION OF FUNCTIONAL ZERO.”



The bar graph below shows how ready the respondents felt their community was to adopt the Functional Zero definition.

FIGURE 7 COMMUNITY READINESS TO ADOPT COMMON DEFINITIONS.



Consultation Key Themes

While there was general support for the proposed definition, key themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the written responses in the survey and feedback during the virtual town halls, as well as specific written submissions for the proposed definition from the Government of Ontario, Region of Waterloo, Edmonton Homeward Trust, and the Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. Changes to the proposed definition and the themes from consultations were also discussed in detail with the Measuring Progress RPA of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness to discern next steps for the definition.

Reframing how we present Functional Zero in relation to Absolute Zero: As we noted in the initial working paper, the lived-experience perspective often focuses on quality-of-life aspects of the definitions, access to appropriate services and housing, and broader root causes of homelessness. This was re-affirmed through the survey process as well. Further, however, some respondents to the general survey noted that the concept of Functional Zero could be considered unethical — as “selling short” Absolute Zero, in other words. Based on this notion, further consideration brought us to define Functional Zero on a trajectory towards Absolute Zero and articulating this further in the revised paper.

In responding to why they didn’t agree with a Functional Zero definition, one survey respondent noted:

“Because I worry that it takes pressure off of us to achieve absolute zero homelessness with all of its complexities. When we think of what systems do to end homelessness for individuals and families, ‘Functional Zero’ might describe the best that a community has to offer. However, when I think of homeless people I’ve met, I don’t believe that coming up with a ‘backup’ definition is a moral or ethical way of measuring the end of homelessness. If we can’t provide hope that an absolute end is possible across Canada, then how can we

maintain hope within our programs, and when we are talking to clients and patients who need it?”

While this sentiment is understandable, we need to reconsider the premise that setting Functional Zero goals for a system of care that are actually achievable is unethical. There is a risk that without such targets, advocates and providers who feel nothing short of an absolute end to homelessness (expressed as affordable housing for all) is worth working toward and, consequently, we end up with disorganized, inefficient, inaccessible, under-resourced crisis-response systems that leave people to languish in shelter and die on the street — when, in fact, we know that highly effective and efficient systems can do better preventing/diverting people from homelessness and, when that’s not possible, ensure immediate access to decent, safe, low-barrier shelter and rehousing assistance, and can actually quickly move a wide spectrum of people to permanent housing with appropriate supports to stabilize and avoid returns. From this perspective, not setting and working to achieve such goals is unethical. As we’re now seeing in the U.S., when a community operationalizes an optimized system, the next logical question and public conversation turns to “Where is inflow coming from?” — promoting efforts to move upstream towards prevention.

Restricting the boundaries of Functional Zero: Interestingly, some participants in the survey and town halls pushed for enhancing focus on key supply-demand measures within the homelessness-prevention system rather than broadening to public systems and the lived-experience perspective. Their argument noted that, while important, the measures beyond length of stay in shelter and the rate of rehousing were not necessary to defining Functional Zero. In considering this further, the team decided to maintain the focus on lived experience and public systems as these point us towards a more fulsome definition of ending homelessness. Further, it aligns with the value we place on lived experience aligning with quantitative measures. We are however placing further emphasis on how communities can tailor the definition locally, and providing enhanced flexibility to this end. This also aligns with the tensions expressed by some participants who argued we should be limited to the definition to chronic or absolute homelessness, whereas other felt it should include the full spectrum of the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, including the at-risk/hidden populations. In considering this point, we maintain support for the broader definition, while providing flexibility for communities to adapt foci or prioritize populations in a phased manner based on local priorities.

Clarifying accountability in meeting defining criteria: another key tension surfaced concerning who is responsible for moving various systems towards meeting the criteria outlined. Some community entities for instance considered themselves unable to change various public systems that were mentioned. Service providers similarly pointed to the need for change in government. In a sense, this does not mean the proposed criteria are wrong; in fact, COH members considered this tension as an expression of what is occurring in communities implementing ending-homelessness initiatives on the ground with varying levels of government support. By mainlining focus on accountability in implementing the definition, we can, however, push various systems to take responsibility for their part in ending homelessness. Without naming this in the definition, such discussion would be restricted.

To address this tension, we recommend keeping the focus of Functional Zero on local systems and then clarifying that broader community goals related to preventing homelessness and promoting housing stability can either be adopted at the community level (e.g., city council) or as a broader community aim working towards Absolute Zero. This would involve accountability for change across public systems or, absent broader support, a homeless crisis

response system can adopt those goals and be measured by the extent to which they effectively advocate with other public systems and within public policy arenas for positive change.

Support for implementation: Overall, the levels of readiness to implement a common definition varied and concern for lack of technical support was expressed during the consultations. To move the definition into practice, a number of suggestions were made:

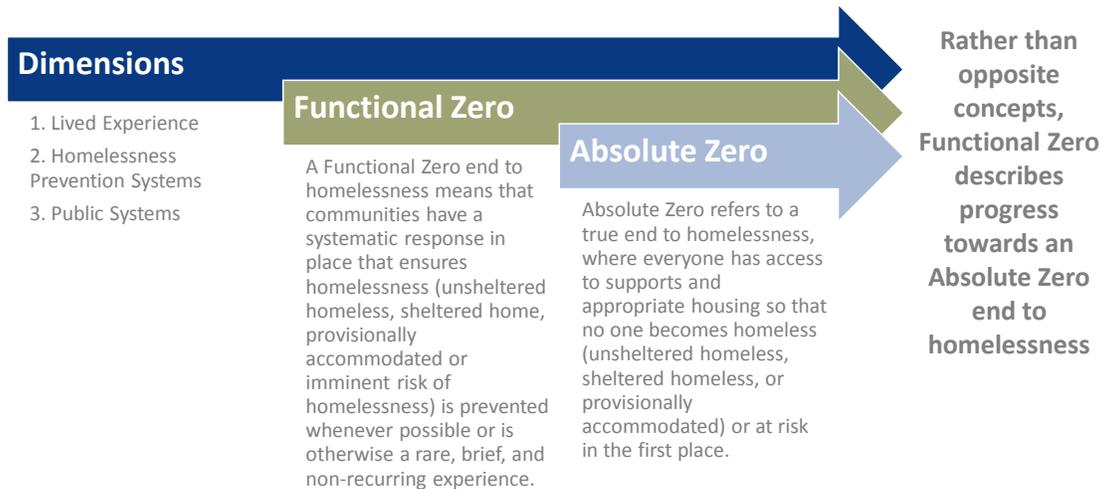
- Include a short definition to enhance accessibility of the concept.
- Develop communication material for general public, visuals, etc.
- Continue knowledge-dissemination activities to support implementation and buy-in across various communities through workshops, community events, etc.
- Provide technical assistance to local leads implementing the definition on performance management, system planning, data analysis, etc.
- Develop a data framework to support local implementation; this should be tailored for various government and local communities.
- Develop consistent data-collection tools to support definition (i.e., client surveys, system-analysis templates, etc.)
- Refine the definition with an indigenous lens.
- Tweak criteria/benchmarks to allow for flexible local implementation.
- Seek endorsement from communities/governments to align work nationally.
- Translate materials into French.

Considering these identified challenges, we acknowledge the need for enhanced community supports for performance management to increase the application of Functional and Absolute Zero. To this end, the COH is exploring various avenues to develop resources and provide technical assistance for communities implementing the definitions on the ground.

DEFINING FUNCTIONAL AND ABSOLUTE ZERO

We reiterate that we consider working towards Functional Zero as progress towards Absolute Zero, rather than considering these concepts in binary opposition. Our proposed definitions of Functional and Absolute Zero are conceptualized within a socio-ecological model that distinguishes the varying levels at which homelessness needs to be addressed. These represent networks of interactions across different, interdependent dimensions.

Short Definitions



We need to also consider both structural and systemic factors, as well as individual and relational factors, which interact with one another in complex ways, impacting an individual's housing situation. Structural and systemic factors include societal and policy-based issues such as poverty, the housing market, and trends in unemployment. Individual factors include mental illness, addictions and health difficulties, etc. The manifestation of these factors will also depend on the particular lifecycle stage (for example, youth, senior or family) and the structural context at play.

Dimensions of Functional and Absolute Zero

We are proposing that to achieve Absolute and Functional Zero, standards and performance measures are needed across three key dimensions depicted in the following diagram to account for these complex interplays.

The examination of varying forms of homelessness using the socio-ecological model points to interventions across levels of society rather than restricting these to the individual or the homelessness-prevention system, or the immediate networks of service providers working to address homelessness in a particular community. It would be inadequate to focus on shifting individual behaviours or within families in order to decrease the incidence of homelessness.

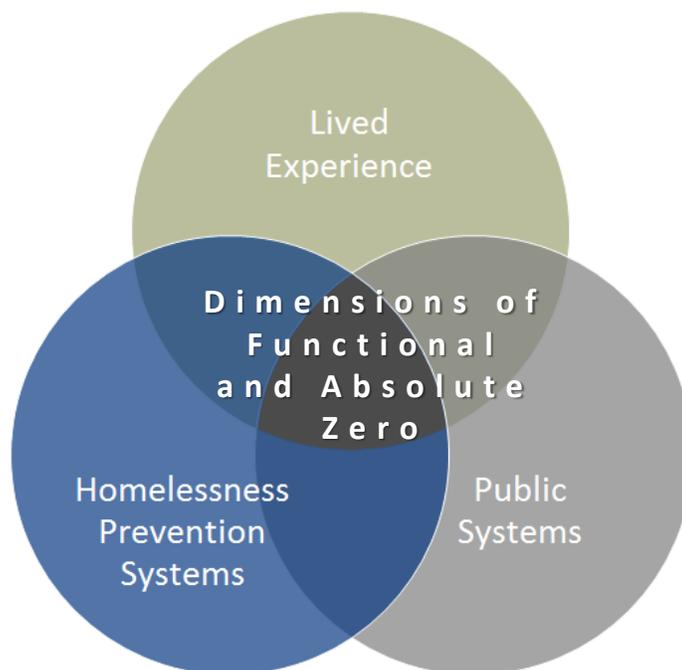
A comprehensive strategy that tackles structural/systemic, community, institutional, interpersonal and individual causes is required. In this manner, the model allows for a much more holistic strategy-development context to tackle homelessness. It further recognizes that the boundaries of homelessness-prevention systems comprise but one element in the dynamics involved in homelessness; as much focus as we place on its workings, its impact is limited.

Key public systems, particularly health, corrections, and child intervention, are well known to have key roles in mitigating or perpetuating homelessness. Further, broader policies and attitudes in society influence such factors as the supply of housing and migration, which in turn impact inflows and demand at the community level. It is unrealistic to expect that the homelessness-prevention system in a city can manage such external drivers at the macro-economic level, although it may have the ability to exercise some degree of influence.

Nonetheless, an end to homelessness requires changes across these levels, even if we are limited from a data perspective with regard to local communities' homelessness response for now.

In developing the definition of Functional and Absolute Zero, standards and performance measures are needed across the following three inter-related dimensions presented in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8 DIMENSIONS OF FUNCTIONAL AND ABSOLUTE ZERO



Dimension 1: Lived Experience — Community members who interact with homeless system and other community systems.

First and foremost, an end to homelessness must resonate for those experiencing homeless and housing instability. If the way we define and measure ending homelessness falls short of the on-the-ground realities of those experiencing homelessness, then we are on the wrong track.

We have to ensure opportunity for the voice of those with lived experience to assess whether progress towards ending homelessness is congruent with their on-the-ground perspectives. Lived experience should confirm whether:

- The homelessness-prevention system is performing as designed, efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of those it serves;
- The levels of service and housing accessibility, sustainability, affordability, safety, and security of tenure are appropriately meeting the needs of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness;
- Those at risk of or experiencing homelessness have an enhanced sense of social inclusion with positive participation in community activities, a sense of belonging, and connection with friends and family.

- Those at risk of or experiencing homelessness should have the choice of housing and supports. Acceptance of any services, including treatment or sobriety, is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing and services. Those at risk of or experiencing homelessness experience service continuity to access appropriate supports within and outside the homelessness-prevention system (housing, addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.).

Dimension 2: Homelessness-prevention system —Key partners define and operationalize a high-functioning, optimized system to meet community needs.

We need to develop a definition that explicitly acknowledges an approach to ending homelessness that is complemented by measurable quantitative indicators of progress and qualitative aspects of well-functioning, optimized homelessness-prevention systems integrated with public systems and supported by policy direction and adequate resources. For instance, elected officials establishing formal policy or at least acknowledging the community value of the right to shelter.

There is no doubt that a well-functioning system of care focused on ending homelessness, with performance measures and quality-assurance standards, can make a significant stride towards ending homelessness. Ideally, the lived-experience perspective will confirm the trends that performance metrics uncover, although this cannot be assumed.

A common definition should apply across the populations of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, rather than limiting efforts to particular sub-populations, such as veterans, youth, the chronically homeless, etc. Establishing sub-population-specific goals can be important to help clarify certain aspects/ features of local systems that should be in place in order to make a valid claim of consistency with the more general definition, and to account for unique needs of and resources available for certain sub-populations.

The definition should be aligned with the Canadian Definition on Homelessness for those at imminent risk of homelessness (see Appendix 4). In the U.S., there is increasingly a focus of homeless-prevention assistance on people most imminently at risk of literal homelessness — that is, people who are losing their housing via eviction with no other housing, and have no other financial resources save for what the homelessness-prevention system offers. This means we consider how well our systems of care perform not just in rehousing those experiencing homelessness, but how well we prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place or from recurring.

Dimension 3: Public Systems — Government and other public systems embrace the value of housing stability and access-to-housing crisis intervention for community members.

Lastly, without public-system and government support and alignment in the goal of ending homelessness, the progress an efficient homelessness-prevention system can achieve will reach a limit. An end to homelessness involves an assessment of the level of integration between the homelessness-prevention system and other key public systems (corrections, child intervention, health, social housing, education, etc.) to meet common community objectives.

The definition should include methods and metrics to assess the homelessness-prevention-system response integration with other key public systems regarding such items as:

- Adequate supply of safe, appropriate, affordable housing.
- Discharging practices from public systems that promote housing stability.
- Not criminalizing homelessness.
- Alignment of public systems at policy and service-delivery levels to identify and effectively intervene with those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Level of access to appropriate mainstream services by homeless/at-risk persons.
- Public-systems capacity to develop preventative approaches that mitigate homelessness risk.

Proposed Indicators

The indicators below are envisioned as a starting point for dialogue and will be refined on a go-forward basis. A community can describe itself as having achieved various levels of the full Functional Zero or Absolute Zero end to homelessness when it has met the indicators outlined below, using a consistent verification process.

Note that each jurisdiction is encouraged to consider adapting these criteria to their local context and using the concepts below in a guidance rather than prescriptive manner. We provide suggested verification sources as well, knowing that in each jurisdiction the capacity of locating necessary data sources or administering suggested data-collection approaches is limited and shaped by various factors. Despite local flexibility, functionally-ended homelessness still requires communities to demonstrate how the dimensions of Functional Zero are being addressed.

There is a need to develop technical-assistance support and tools for various jurisdictions aiming to move forward, with the understanding that adaptation for a rural northern community will look very differently from that for a large urban centre. For instance, in rural centres that might not even have emergency shelters, a number of measures proposed are irrelevant, such as length of stay in shelter. In this instance, it may be more meaningful for the community to focus on preventing homelessness and developing verification sources that track hidden homelessness and access to housing and supports. Rural centres can and should be able to measure time from identification of an unsheltered person to permanent housing. While there are fewer unsheltered people in rural areas, people do lose housing in every type of community: rural, urban and even those communities with much stronger social bonds and higher levels of familial responsiveness and accommodation. In this sense, there are system qualities and responses every community needs to have in place, but the implementation approach may vary.

We also suggest that communities consider phasing in various aspects of the definition based on local context. For instance, it may make more sense to focus on a lower length of shelter stays for the next three years, and then phase in client perception of services.

Dimension 1: Lived experience

Functional Zero Indicators	Absolute Zero Indicators	Verification Sources
<i>Indicators of Progress towards Outcome</i>	<i>Indicators of Outcome Achievement</i>	
<p>1.1 Program and housing participants served by a homelessness-prevention system (including shelter, transitional housing and Housing First programs, etc.) increasingly report being moderately or highly satisfied, at rates nearing 100 per cent, with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter quality and safety; Housing security of tenure, affordability and safety; Case-management services received; Being treated with dignity, respect, and having self-determination/choice in housing and supports; Access to appropriate supports to address diverse needs within homeless system and mainstream public systems (addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.); Process of referral and intake into programs, shelters and housing; Housing secured, stabilization and aftercare supports; Perception of quality of life, including sense of belonging, participation in community activities, and connection with friends and family. 	<p>1.1 Program and housing participants served by a homelessness-prevention system (including shelter, transitional housing, and Housing First programs, etc.) increasingly report being highly satisfied (at or above 90 per cent satisfaction) with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter quality and safety; Housing security of tenure, affordability and safety; Case-management services received; Being treated with dignity, respect, and having self-determination/choice in housing and supports; Access to appropriate supports to address diverse needs within homeless system and mainstream public systems (addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.); Process of referral and intake into programs, shelters and housing; Housing secured, stabilization and aftercare supports; Perception of quality of life, including sense of belonging, participation in community activities, and connection with friends and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program participant surveys/ interviews. Lived-experience consultations (surveys, focus groups, interviews, advisory groups). System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, by-name lists, program evaluations). System of care site visits by a third party. Stakeholder consultations. Service-standards assessments.
<p>1.2 Emerging and increasing evidence of systematic and effective inclusion of those with lived experience in community co-ordination efforts and decision-making to develop and deliver services in the homelessness-prevention system.</p>	<p>1.2 Transparent and verified evidence of systematic and effective inclusion of those with lived experience in community co-ordination efforts and decision-making to develop and deliver services in the homelessness-prevention system.</p>	

Dimension 2: Homelessness-prevention system

Functional Zero Indicators	Absolute Zero Indicators	Verification Sources
<i>Indicators of Progress towards Outcome</i>	<i>Indicators of Outcome Achievement</i>	
<p>2.1 Total number of unsheltered persons and emergency-sheltered persons is consistently decreasing year over year towards zero; the community has reduced its initial baseline total unsheltered and emergency-sheltered count by 90 per cent. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.2 Length of stay in emergency shelter and length of being unsheltered is consistently decreasing year over year towards zero. The community has reduced the initial baseline length of stay in homelessness (unsheltered and emergency sheltered) by 90 per cent. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.3 The number entering versus exiting the homelessness-prevention system has a steady or decreasing rate. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.4 There is a high percentage of positive homelessness-prevention system exits (above 90 per cent), including successful and stable natural-supports placements.</p> <p>2.5 All unsheltered persons in a community are engaged with services and have been offered low-barrier shelter and housing at least every two weeks. Community has capacity to provide universal access to low-barrier shelter. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.6 No more than 10 per cent of those who exit homelessness return within 12 months. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.7 People are diverted/prevented from experiencing homelessness (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provincially accommodated) wherever possible. As a result, there is a consistent reduction year over year in the number of homeless persons in emergency shelter and transitional housing/outreach with no previous homelessness experience. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p> <p>2.8 Community planning and service delivery is highly co-ordinated using a systems approach that includes co-ordinated entry, assessment, formal standards of care, integration strategies with public systems, performance management and a funding-allocation process. This performance is improved/maintained year over year.</p>	<p>2.1 The total number of unsheltered and emergency-sheltered homeless persons will be zero at any point in time.</p> <p>2.2 Prevention services are in place to divert all persons at risk of homelessness.</p> <p>2.3 Homelessness does not occur, because systems closely co-ordinate and the homelessness-prevention system has the capacity and processes in place to assure all people without adequate, safe housing are immediately (same day) provided access to a permanent housing unit or other acceptable non-homeless placement (e.g., residential treatment).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System/program-level data analysis (HIFIS, PIT Count, HMIS, by-name lists, program evaluations). • System of care site visits. • Stakeholder consultations. • Service-standards assessments.

Dimension 3: Public systems

Functional Zero Indicators	Absolute Zero Indicators	Verification Sources
<i>Indicators of Progress towards Outcome</i>	<i>Indicators of Outcome Achievement</i>	
3.1 Percentage of those entering the homelessness-prevention system from other public systems is consistently decreasing (e.g., child protection, corrections, social housing, health, addiction treatment, etc.).	3.1 The incidence of persons exiting public systems into homelessness is eliminated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public and private investment in system. • Public-system and policy stakeholder interviews/focus groups. • Policy, procedural and funding analysis. • System-integration analyses. • Program-participant surveys/interviews. • Lived-experience consultations (surveys, focus groups, interviews, advisory groups). • System/program-level data analysis. • System of care site visits. • Stakeholder consultations.
3.2 All levels of government commit that no one should be forced to live on streets and provide sufficient resources to meet emergency-shelter demand, at a minimum.	3.2 Adequate affordable housing supply is in place and accessible to meet demand from those at imminent risk of homelessness to ensure no one becomes homeless in the first place.	
3.3 Co-ordination efforts are emerging between homeless and public systems to ensure appropriate referrals and timely access to services/supports to prevent and end homelessness. This includes public systems conducting standardized screening for housing-status/-assistance needs and having in place standardized protocols for addressing needs of people.	3.3 Formalized and effective co-ordination efforts are in place between the homelessness-prevention system and public systems to ensure appropriate referrals and timely access to services/supports to prevent homelessness.	
3.4 Funding is increasingly co-ordinated and aligned with community needs to ensure service-delivery levels sustain a high functioning system.	3.4 Diverse public and private funding sources are highly co-ordinated and secured to maintain service-delivery levels to sustain a high-functioning system.	
3.5 There is increasing evidence of funding and policy co-ordination across government to ensure ending-homelessness objectives are supported. This includes removal of laws that criminalize homelessness.	3.5 Funding and policy across government are highly integrated to support ending-homelessness objectives.	

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to ground proposed definitions of a Functional Zero and an Absolute Zero end to homelessness for Canada within existing approaches and a lived-experience lens. Over the course of 2016, an initial working paper was the basis for consultations across the country with key stakeholders to refine the definitions for the endorsement of the COH, CAEH and other partners working towards ending homelessness.

Future work will expand on aspects of implementation, including the verification process and data-collection tools, as well as capacity-building for communities. Adaptations of the definitions for key groups, including youth and indigenous peoples, should be explored as well.

There is a need to develop a consistent process for validating communities' progress towards Absolute and Functional Zero, which can include community self-assessment, review panels, site visits, independent data collection/analysis, etc. Capacity-building and technical-assistance supports would need to be in place for communities to adopt and implement the definition in practice as well.

We will need to identify acceptable sources of data to validate community progress, test the proposed approach with pilot communities, and refine it on an ongoing basis. Funders will have to be engaged to reinforce the definition across diverse investments. Notably, developing strategies to integrate the definition, validation process, and capacity-building across public systems will be needed longer-term to ensure this exercise is not limited to the bounds of homelessness-prevention systems.

APPENDIX 1 – PLANS REVIEWED

CANADA

TABLE 1 MUNICIPAL PLANS

Municipality	Plan
Ontario	
Brantford	Brantford-Brant Housing Stability Plan 2014 to 2024 (2014)
Durham Region	At Home in Durham: Durham Region Housing Plan 2014-2024 (2014)
Hamilton	Everyone has a home... Home is the foundation: Hamilton's Housing & Homelessness Action Plan (2013)
Kingston	10-Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan in the City of Kingston and the County of Frontenac (2013)
London	Homelessness Prevention and Housing Plan 2010-2024 (2013)
Niagara Region	A Home For All: Niagara's 10-year community action plan to help people find and keep housing (2013)
District of Nipissing	A Place to Call Home: Nipissing District 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2013)
Ottawa	A Home For Everyone: Our Ten Year Plan 2014-2024 (2013)
Peel Region	Peel's Housing and Homelessness Plan: A Community Strategy 2014-2024 (2013)
Peterborough	Peterborough 10-year housing & homelessness Plan: Action Plan 2014-2018 (2013)
The District of Thunder Bay	Under One Roof: A Housing and Homelessness Plan 2014-2024 (2014)
Toronto	Housing Opportunities Toronto: An Affordable Housing Action Plan 2010-2020 (2009)
---	Housing Stability Service Planning Framework 2014-2019 (2013)
Waterloo Region	Waterloo Region's Housing Action Plan - 2014-2024 (2013)
Windsor Essex	Windsor Essex Housing and Homelessness Plan (2014)
York Region	Housing Solutions: A place for everyone - York Region 10-Year Housing Plan (2014)
Alberta	
Calgary	Calgary's Updated Plan to End Homelessness: People First in Housing First (2015)
Edmonton	A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2009)
Grande Prairie	Home is where one starts from: Grande Prairie's Multi-year Plan to End Homelessness 2009-2014 (2009)
Lethbridge	"Bringing Lethbridge Home": 5 Year Community Plan to End Homelessness 2009-2014 (2009)
Medicine Hat	At Home in Medicine Hat: Our Plan to End Homelessness (2014)
Red Deer	Everyone's Home: Red Deer's Give Year Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2018 (2014)
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo	Heading Home: The Right Thing to Do - 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2010-2020 (2010)
British Columbia	
Kamloops	Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan (2010)
Surrey	Master Plan for Housing the Homeless in Surrey (2013)
Vancouver	Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2012-2021 (2011)
Victoria	Solving Homelessness in British Columbia's Capital Region: A Community Plan (2012)
Saskatchewan	
Saskatoon	The Saskatoon Housing and Homelessness Plan 2011-2014 (2011)
Manitoba	
Winnipeg	The Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg (2014)

TABLE 2 PROVINCIAL PLANS

Province	Plan
Alberta	A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years (2008)
British Columbia	Housing Matters BC - Housing Strategy for British Columbia: A Foundation for Strong Communities (2014)
Manitoba	Strong Communities: An Action Plan (2011)
New Brunswick	Hope is a Home: New Brunswick's Housing Strategy (2010)
Ontario	Building Foundations: Building Futures - Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (2010)
---	Ontario Housing Policy Statement (Current)
---	Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CPHI): Program Guidelines (2012)
Saskatchewan	The Saskatchewan Advantage Housing Plan (2011)

U.S.**TABLE 3 MUNICIPAL/LOCAL PLANS**

Municipality	Plan
Arlington County, Virginia	A Passageway Home: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Arlington County, Virginia (2006)
Cape Fear Region, North Carolina	The Street is No Place to Live: Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in the Cape Fear Region (2008)
Houston, Texas	Strategy Plan to Address Homelessness Houston/Harris County (2006)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Philadelphia's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: Creating Homes, Strengthening Communities, and Improving Systems (2005)
Portland, Oregon	Home Again: A 10-year plan to end homeless in Portland and Multnomah County (2004)
Oakland County, Michigan	Mission Possible: Oakland County's Community Plan to End Homelessness (2006)
Missoula, Montana	Reaching Home: Missoula's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness 2012-2022 (2012)
New Orleans, Louisiana	Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2011)
Salt Lake City, Utah	New Vision New Opportunities: Salt Lake County Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (2006)
Seattle/King County, Washington	A Roof Over Every Bed in King County: Our Community's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness (2006)

TABLE 4 - STATE PLANS

State	Plan
Louisiana	State of Louisiana Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness: The Road to Supportive Housing (2009)
Oregon	A Home for Hope: A 10-year plan to end homelessness in Oregon (2008)
Texas	Annual Report and Pathways Home Addendum (2012)
Utah	Utah's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and Reduce Overall Homelessness by 2014 (2008)

EUROPE

TABLE 5 EUROPEAN PLANS

Country	Municipality	Plan
Denmark	---	The Government's Homelessness Strategy: A Strategy to Reduce Homelessness in Denmark (2009)
England	---	Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide (2011)
Ireland	---	The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013 (2008)
---	---	Homeless Strategy National Implementation Plan (2008)
---	Dublin	Sustaining Dublin's Pathway to Home: The Homeless Action Plan for Dublin, 2014 to 2016 (2013)
Norway	---	The Pathway to a Permanent Home: Strategy to prevent and combat homelessness (2006)
Scotland	Glasgow	Strategy for Preventing and Alleviating Homelessness in Glasgow 2009-2012 (2008)
Sweden	---	Homelessness: Multiple faces, Multiple Responsibilities - A strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market (2007)

AUSTRALIA

TABLE 5 - AUSTRALIAN PLANS

Country	Province/Municipality	Plan
Australia	---	The Road Home - A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008)
---	New South Wales	A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW - NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014 (2009)

APPENDIX 2 - HPS MEASUREMENT

HPS MEASUREMENT

Indicator	Targets	Date to Achieve	Source
SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS			
National Indicators			
Estimated annual number of unique individuals using emergency shelters	n/a	n/a	NHIS
Estimated number of shelter users that are chronically homeless (proxy = number of clients with 180 or more nights in shelter) *	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	NHIS
Estimated number of shelter users that are episodically homeless (proxy = number of clients with 3 or more episodes of homelessness) *	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	NHIS
Estimated number of people living on the street (sleeping rough)	Proposed reduction of 20%	2017-18	PiT count
Reduction in the usage of emergency shelters, as measured by number of 'bednights' utilised	15%	2017-18	NHIS
Community Indicators			
Percentage of Communities that have demonstrated a reduction in homelessness through their point-in-time count	60%	2017-18	PiT count
Amount invested by external partners for every dollar invested by the HPS *	\$1.50	2015-16	CP Annual Update
PROJECT-LEVEL INDICATORS			
HF Placement Indicators			
Number of individuals placed in housing through an HF intervention	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at six months	80%	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at twelve months	80%	2016-17	HERIN
Number of days to move HF clients into permanent housing (after intake or assessment - to be determine by the community)	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who were re-housed	<30%	2016-17	HERIN
Percentage of HF clients who return to homelessness	<15%	2016-17	HERIN
Non-HF Placement Indicator			
Percentage of Non-HF clients who remained housed at six months	80%	2016-2017	HERIN
Self-Sufficiency Indicators			
Percentage of HF clients who have successfully exited the program to a positive housing situation	CTD	2017-18	HERIN
Number of people who increased their employment stability or started part-time or full-time employment	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who increased their income or income stability	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who started part-time or full-time education	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Number of people who started a job training program	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
Prevention Indicator			
Number of people that remained housed at three months after receiving a Housing Loss Prevention intervention *	CTD	2016-17	HERIN
	80%	2017-18	HERIN

LEGEND	
Targets that community are responsible for developing in CP (CTD = community to develop)	CTD
New indicators being introduced for 2014-19	
National Homelessness Information System	NHIS
Homelessness Electronic Reporting Information Network	HERIN
Indicators included in ESDC Reports on Plans and Priorities (RPP) submitted to Parliament	*

NOTES

The National Homeless Information System data comes from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and non HIFIS systems.

HERIN collects project-level outcome data from all organizations receiving HPS funding under the Designated, Aboriginal and Rural and Remote funding streams

APPENDIX 3 - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Information

1. How long have you experienced homelessness for? OR How long were you homeless for?
2. Are you aware that there is an effort going on to end homelessness?
 - a) If NO, provide brief synopsis of the effort being made in Canada.

Comprehension

1. Are you aware if your community has made a commitment to end homelessness? (*Skip question if response to previous question was NO*)
2. Have you seen any changes in the type of homeless services/programs in the past five to 10 years?
 - a) If YES: What changes have you seen? Do you see these changes as an improvement over the previous services/programs?
 - b) If NO: What are your general thoughts on the current services/programs being offered? Do you see them as being effective?

Application

1. What do you think “ending homelessness” means?
2. What would ending homelessness look like from your perspective?
3. When would you consider yourself no longer homeless? OR When did you no longer consider yourself homeless?

Analysis

1. Do you think other people who are experiencing homelessness might agree with your definition? Can you explain please?
2. Based on your definition, do you think the necessary services/programs are in place to help you achieve this goal? Can you explain please?

Synthesis/Evaluation

1. What services/programs do you think might help yourself or other homeless persons exit out of homelessness? Can you explain please?

Conclusion

1. Is there anything else relating to the topic of “ending homelessness” that you would like to mention?

APPENDIX 4 - CANADIAN DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

TYOLOGY

OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	LIVING SITUATION	GENERIC DEFINITION
1 UNSHELTERED This includes people who lack housing and are not accessing emergency shelters or accommodation, except during extreme weather conditions. In most cases, people are staying in places that are not designed for or fit for human habitation.	1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public space, such as sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc. Private space and vacant buildings (squatting)
	1.2 People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living in cars or other vehicles Living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation People in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents
2 EMERGENCY SHELTERED This refers to people who, because they cannot secure permanent housing, are accessing emergency shelter and system supports, generally provided at no cost or minimal cost to the user. Such accommodation represents an institutional response to homelessness provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations and / or volunteers.	2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless	These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal persons, for instance.
	2.2 Shelters for individuals/families impacted by family violence	These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather.
	2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods, etc.	
3 PROVISIONALLY ACCOMMODATED This describes situations in which people, who are technically homeless and without permanent shelter, access accommodation that offers no prospect of permanence. Those who are provisionally accommodated may be accessing temporary housing provided by government or the non-profit sector, or may have independently made arrangements for short-term accommodation.	3.1 Interim Housing for people who are homeless	Interim housing is a systems-supported form of housing that is meant to bridge the gap between unsheltered homelessness or emergency accommodation and permanent housing.
	3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing	Often referred to as 'couch surfers' or the 'hidden homeless', this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers.
	3.3 People accessing short term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure	In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc.
	3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements	People who may transition into homelessness upon release from: Penal institutions; Medical / mental health institutions; Residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers; Children's institutions / group homes.
	3.5 Accommodation / reception centers for recently arrived immigrants and refugees	Prior to securing their own housing, recently arrived immigrants and refugees may be temporarily housed while receiving settlement support and orientation to life in Canada.
4 AT-RISK OF HOMELESSNESS Although not technically homeless, this includes individuals or families whose current housing situations are dangerously lacking security or stability, and so are considered to be at-risk of homelessness . They are living in housing that is intended for permanent human habitation, and could potentially be permanent (as opposed to those who are provisionally accommodated). However, as a result of external hardship, poverty, personal crisis, discrimination, a lack of other available and affordable housing, and / or the inappropriateness of their current housing (which may be overcrowded or does not meet public health and safety standards) residents may be "at risk" of homelessness.	4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those whose employment is precarious Those experiencing sudden unemployment Households facing eviction Housing with transitional supports about to be discontinued People with severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use, and / or behavioural issues Breakdown in family relations People facing, or living in direct fear, of violence / abuse
	4.2 Individuals and families who are precariously housed	Those who face challenges that may or may not leave them homeless in the immediate or near future. CMHC defines a household as being in core housing need if its housing: "falls below at least one of the adequacy, affordability or suitability standards and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three housing standards)."

For a more detailed typology of the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, go to: www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelesdefinition

About the Authors

Dr. Alina Turner is recognized as a leading homelessness researcher and is a Fellow at The School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary. In her consulting work (Turner Research & Strategy), she supports with a variety of organizations to support human service system planning and integration, including plans to end homelessness and transitions to Housing First. She also engages in academic and applied research on issues including housing stress, poverty, domestic violence, migration and rural social issues. She has extensive experience in strategy and program development on a variety of social issues.

Prior to consulting, Alina was the Vice President of Strategy for the Calgary Homeless Foundation where she led program investments of more than \$35M annually, system planning and integration, the Homeless Management Information System, research and policy. She also worked for the United Way of Calgary and Area leading the affordable housing policy and research portfolio. In 2012, she was appointed by the Mayor Nenshi to serve on the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative's leadership committee.

Tom Albanese is a Senior Associate with Abt Associates and has provided planning, development, and implementation support for housing and homeless programs since 1992. He currently serves as the national technical assistance co-lead for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program and as a lead technical assistance provider for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Tom currently provides support for New York City, the State of California, and a variety of other states and localities concerning homeless system planning, performance, program design, and quality improvement, including adoption of Housing First practices. Prior to joining Abt, Tom served as Director of Programs and Planning for the Community Shelter Board (CSB) in Columbus, Ohio, and as Associate Director of a diverse family services agency in Northeast Ohio. Tom is a Licensed Social Worker in the state of Ohio.

Kyle Pakeman is currently a Master of Planning Candidate (2016) at Queen's University. With a background in Sociology, Kyle is focusing his studies on social and health planning. His thesis is investigating the usefulness of an innovative Area-based Deprivation Index in mid-size cities in Canada. Kyle's work experience includes working with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) as a summer research intern in 2015 and as a research assistant for eight months. During his time at the COH he was involved in projects ranging from youth homeless prevention to eviction prevention.

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The School of Public Policy

University of Calgary, Downtown Campus
906 8th Avenue S.W., 5th Floor
Calgary, Alberta T2P 1H9
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ISSN

1919-112x SPP Research Papers (Print)
1919-1138 SPP Research Papers (Online)

DATE OF ISSUE

January 2017

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