

# A Place to Belong

A Special Report on Youth  
Homelessness in Alberta

# Message from the Advocate

Under my authority as defined in section 9.2(h) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, I am presenting this special report which focuses on young people's experiences with homelessness in Alberta.

In 2025, we released 68 investigative reviews regarding the circumstances of children and youth who were seriously injured or passed away. Of these, 42 had been unhoused in some capacity with 32 of them having stayed in shelters or slept outside. In the same time period, we advocated directly for over 100 young people who were either currently or had recently been unhoused.

This report is informed directly by the voices and lived experiences of young people. I am grateful to each one of them for sharing with us, the agencies that supported this engagement, and the community stakeholders and professionals who shared their perspectives. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Elder Theodore (Ted) Quinney, whose ceremony, teachings, and prayers supported and grounded this work.

Many young people who experience homelessness have had involvement with the child intervention or youth justice systems. They often face significant adversity, carry the impacts of complex trauma, and have not consistently been able to access the supports they need. A safe, stable place to call home is essential to a young person's well-being and ability to thrive. The emotional and developmental impacts of homelessness must also be acknowledged when considering long-term stability.

Youth homelessness must end. It is critical to respond quickly when young people become unhoused and provide access to a spectrum of supports that can be tailored to their individual needs. While we have seen some positive changes, more must be done to support these vulnerable young people.

**Terri Pelton**

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

**Tell people we're not bad kids. We just didn't have anywhere else to go.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

**You really have to push for any supports, because there are not enough services and supports to go around for everyone.**

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **16**

**Kids who are unhoused, who don't have anywhere to go, they are just kids. Just because they are homeless, doesn't mean they should be robbed of their childhood. It doesn't mean they don't have the same hopes and dreams as everybody else.**

Age of young person: **22**  
First unhoused at age: **21**



**If you want to solve the problem, you need to start sooner. Almost everyone on the streets has serious childhood trauma and issues. The older we get, the harder it is to get out of this lifestyle. It is like we give up because we just know this is how life will be.**

Age of young person: **24**  
First unhoused at age: **17**

# Executive Summary



This report was guided by extensive consultation with young people across the province. Having a safe place to call home is crucial for a young person's well-being and their ability to succeed and thrive. Preventing and addressing youth homelessness requires urgent and concerted action. Alberta needs an updated, youth-specific plan that includes expanding data collection to better inform planning and decision-making.

Many young people became homeless with their families, or had to leave due to family breakdown, often involving conflict, neglect, abuse, or parents being unable to address their children's complex needs. A key aspect of youth homelessness prevention is increasing the supports available to families so they can create a healthy, stable home life for their children. This should include increasing access to affordable housing, enhancing both community-based prevention and intensive supports, and ensuring involvement from the child intervention system when needed.

For young people receiving child intervention services, not having placements that meet their needs contributes to becoming unhoused. Supports for youth leaving care must be increased to ensure their transition to adulthood is similar to those not in government care. Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP) housing supports should be aligned with the *Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care*, published by the Child Welfare League of Canada.<sup>1</sup>

How we intervene when a young person first becomes unhoused can alter their path and, in many cases, prevent them from becoming entrenched in homelessness. Having a spectrum of supports is essential to meeting youth where they are, from outreach and drop-ins to service hubs and wraparound programming. Youth shelters serve a critical role in supporting young people who are unhoused. It is crucial that young adults from 18 to 24 years old also have access to shelter services that meet their developmental needs and connect them to resources.

Not only do young people need support to meet their basic physical and emotional needs, but there also needs to be a focus on helping them exit homelessness. This includes enhancing efforts to connect them with healthy family and natural supports and reducing wait times for safe and suitable housing. If youth homelessness occurs, quick and effective action must be taken to prevent it from becoming long-term.

When we look at building long-term stability, it is important to consider the emotional trauma young people suffered when they were homeless. It takes time to heal from these experiences. It is vital that housing-based supports be sustained long enough for them to move beyond survival mode and be given the opportunity to thrive. Offering wraparound and individualized supports, alongside housing, can promote long-term stability and help give young people a sense of belonging. There are excellent examples within Alberta of housing programs supporting young people who have exited homelessness. These types of programs work, and more are urgently needed.



The Child and Youth Advocate is making four recommendations to address youth homelessness in Alberta.

**1. The Ministry of Children and Family Services and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction should collaborate to develop a provincial youth-specific homelessness strategy designed to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness that includes increased data collection and public reporting.**

**Further comments**

The strategy should:

- Be designed to meet the needs of young people up to 24 years old.
- Expand data collection to better capture prevalence and experiences of unhoused young people, including those not accessing shelters.
- Focus on prevention, early intervention, and housing stability.
- Outline a continuum of housing options from transitional to supportive housing in communities across the province.
- Identify specific actions to support safe, planned, and well-supported transitions from youth to adult serving systems and programs.
- Embed culturally appropriate and responsive approaches for Indigenous and other disproportionately affected young people.
- Include clear goals, timelines and public reporting on progress.

**Expected outcomes**

- Improved understanding of the prevalence, pathways, and duration of youth homelessness.
- More coordinated prevention-focused planning, service coordination, and policy development across systems.
- Young people receive a more comprehensive and coordinated range of services to prevent and address homelessness.

**2. The Ministry of Children and Family Services, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, and the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Status of Women should publicly report on their efforts to collaborate and coordinate to help prevent youth homelessness. This should include how they are ensuring a robust continuum of universal and targeted prevention, early intervention, and intensive supports for families.**

**Further comments**

- Families require timely access to a coordinated range of support that will be available within their community.
- The Ministries should publicly identify coordination efforts to provide families with a comprehensive continuum of support.

**Expected outcomes**

- Families have the support they need to create a healthy, stable home life for their children which will help prevent youth homelessness.
- Families are supported during times of crisis.
- Public reporting of coordination efforts will strengthen the understanding of the continuum of community-based support available to families.

**3. The Ministry of Children and Family Services should align the housing supports currently provided under the Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP) with the housing pillar from the *Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care*.**

**Further comments**

- The *Equitable Standards* provide a framework to help ensure that all young adults transitioning from care can expect equitable, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate support, including housing.
- The Ministry should review how the current TAP housing supports compare with the housing pillar of the *Equitable Standards*.
- There is an evaluation model available for the *Equitable Standards* which may assist with this review and alignment.<sup>2</sup>
- The Ministry should publicly identify actions required to align the TAP's housing supports with the *Equitable Standards*.

**Expected outcomes**

- Young adults receiving services through TAP will be provided equitable, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate housing supports.
- Public alignment of youth housing supports with the *Equitable Standards* strengthens transparency in TAP and commitment to continuous improvement in services for young people.

**4. The Ministry of Children and Family Services should increase the capacity within youth shelters to provide specialized support that helps young people build and maintain healthy relationships with their family and natural supports.**

**Further comments**

- Young people who are unhoused often experience disrupted or strained relationships and require support to build and maintain healthy connections.
- Youth shelters are a key point of contact and opportunity to support young people in strengthening their connection to family and natural supports.
- Strengthening these connections may include finding family and natural supports, facilitating dispute resolution, and providing mentorship to help young people develop relationship skills.
- Specialized training and resource capacity within youth shelters are required to effectively do this complex work.

**Expected outcomes**

- Youth shelters have the funding and resources to support young people in building and maintaining healthy relationships with their family and natural supports.
- More young people are connected to family and natural supports.
- Strengthened connections contribute to reduced duration and recurrence of youth homelessness.

# Introduction

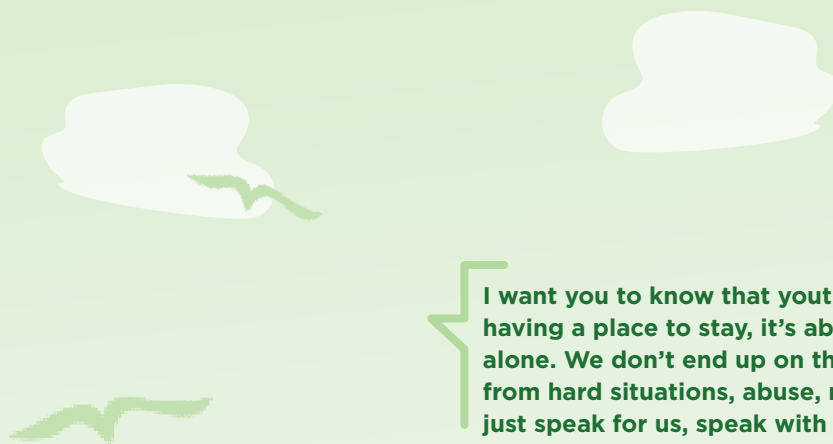
The Child and Youth Advocate has the authority to provide advice to the Government of Alberta on matters relating to the rights, interests, and well-being of children receiving designated services (child intervention or youth justice) under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. Through our community engagement, advocacy, and investigations work, we have seen a persistent concern related to youth homelessness and identified it as a systemic issue. We have a collaborative approach to systemic advocacy across all areas of the OCYA, enabling us to identify, track, and act on systemic issues.

Having a safe and suitable place to call home is fundamental to physical and mental health, human dignity, and an individual's ability to succeed and thrive.<sup>3</sup> The right to adequate housing is included in Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*<sup>4</sup> and Article 27 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*.<sup>5</sup> Addressing youth homelessness requires urgent and concerted action from Alberta's child-serving systems.

In 2025, our direct advocacy staff worked with over 100 young people who were or had recently been unhoused. For approximately half, this included staying in shelters or sleeping outside. The remainder were instances of hidden homelessness, including staying temporarily with others or in facilities not intended as housing, such as Child Intervention offices. In the same year, we released investigative reviews regarding the circumstances of 68 children and youth who were seriously injured or passed away.<sup>6</sup> Of these, 42 had been unhoused at some point and, for 32, this involved staying in shelters or sleeping outside.

What we see through our work with young people involved in the child intervention and youth justice systems is only a small snapshot of the number of young people who are unhoused throughout Alberta. We are unable to report on the total number due to limited tracking of youth homelessness on a provincial level. We know, however, that youth homelessness exists throughout Alberta due to recent counts conducted by various communities.<sup>7</sup>

**In this report, we adopt the *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness* definition of homelessness as being “without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.”<sup>8</sup> It includes being unsheltered (e.g., living in public spaces or in tents), staying in emergency shelters, and being provisionally accommodated (e.g., temporarily staying with others or in various types of short-term and insecure living arrangements).**

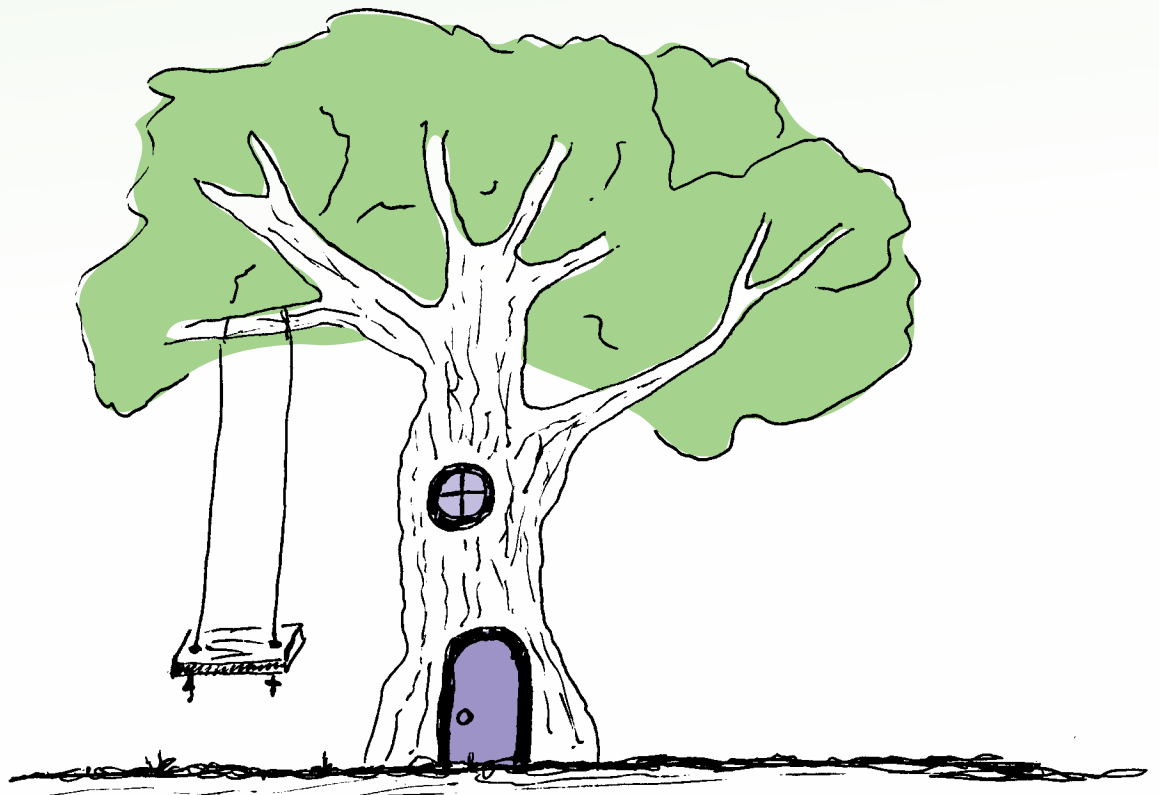


**I want you to know that youth homelessness is not just about not having a place to stay, it's about feeling forgotten, unsafe, and alone. We don't end up on the streets by choice. Many of us come from hard situations, abuse, racism, systems that failed us ... Don't just speak for us, speak with us. We have ideas, we have strength, and we matter. Please don't let us be forgotten.**

Age of young person: **17**

First unhoused at age: **14**

In 2015, the Government of Alberta recognized the importance of addressing youth homelessness and charted the path forward in *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness*.<sup>9</sup> Since its release, there have been innovative and positive steps taken. However, youth homelessness remains a significant concern in the province. In 2022, the Government of Alberta released its *Action Plan on Homelessness*,<sup>10</sup> which lacks a youth-specific focus. Efforts must be increased to end youth homelessness. In this report, we connect research, leading practices and insights from our consultations on how youth homelessness can be prevented, young people can be better supported, and long-term housing stability can be achieved.



# Our Report Process



We identified youth homelessness as a systemic issue and connected with leading practice and research experts on youth homelessness prevention. Our approach to systemic issues is guided by the perspectives of young people with lived experience. This is grounded in Article 12 of the *UNCRC*, which recognizes young people’s right to have their voices heard about issues that affect them.<sup>11</sup> From the earliest stages of the report, young people were instrumental:

- the OCYA Youth Council, made up of diverse young people from across Alberta who have lived experience with the child intervention or youth justice systems, provided initial guidance on our approach;
- young people with lived experience of being unhoused gave feedback that informed our engagement plan; and,
- a young person joined our expert panel to help us understand the complexities of youth homelessness.

Given the vulnerability of youth who have experienced homelessness, we wanted to approach engagement in ways that would minimize potential harm. We collaborated with PolicyWise for Children and Families, combining their research expertise and our advocacy experience, to create *A Guide to Engaging Youth Experiencing Houselessness*.<sup>12</sup> This guide is publicly available.



This guide, along with our office’s *Engaging Young People Framework*,<sup>13</sup> structured how we approached our consultation process and how we engaged with young people through a trauma-informed lens. We worked with community agencies that provide support and services to unhoused youth. These agencies shared the opportunity to participate, hosted the events, and offered assistance to young people during and after the interviews. In alignment with our guiding principle of reciprocity, food, supplies, and honoraria were provided regardless of the young person’s level of engagement.

Interviews and surveys were structured to allow youth to give as much information as they were comfortable sharing. They could skip personal questions and only discuss broader systemic concerns. Alternatively, they could send a short message to the Child and Youth Advocate. We also had a thorough consent process. After the interviews, young people had the opportunity to review the notes taken and remove any information they did not want included.

We are grateful to each young person who took the time to speak with us and share their insights and experiences. We also wish to express our appreciation to the many community agencies that helped connect us with young people. Their dedication to serving this population was clear, and we recognize the time and energy they devoted to helping us include youth voice in this report. Without their support, the level of engagement achieved would not have been possible.



Our community engagement occurred throughout the province starting in July 2025. We completed consultations with participants from Calgary, Edmonton, Edson, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Little Red River Cree Nation, Piikani Nation, Red Deer, Vulcan, and Wetaskiwin. Online surveys provided additional opportunities for young people and stakeholders across Alberta to share their perspectives.

We heard from

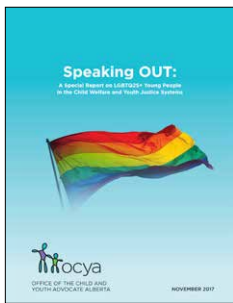
## 156 YOUNG PEOPLE

(ages 12 to 24)

who were or had been unhoused, and

## 170 STAKEHOLDERS

with professional or lived experience of youth homelessness (service providers, family, and adults who had been unhoused as youth).



Approximately 35% of the young people we spoke to identified as 2SLGBTQIA+. This aligns with national statistics suggesting that this group is overrepresented amongst those experiencing homelessness, especially youth.<sup>14</sup> This was an issue identified in our 2017 special report, *Speaking Out*, and in our follow-up 2019 report.<sup>15</sup> In both, the unique vulnerability of this population was recognized, and recommendations included the need for individualized living options.

Our engagement also reflected the intersection of youth homelessness with both the Child Intervention and justice systems. Approximately 40% of the young people we engaged with reported justice involvement, and approximately 65% indicated Child Intervention involvement.

Nearly half (45%) of the youth identified as Indigenous, highlighting the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth within the unhoused population. They shared that their families and communities were affected by discrimination and intergenerational trauma from colonization and residential schools. Many communities have limited resources, and young people may have to leave to find supports and housing. *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*<sup>16</sup> gives communities the option to have greater legal say in how families, children, and youth from their Nation receive help. This is promising and may allow work with young people to be more connected to culture and community.

This report was supported by Elder Theodore (Ted) Quinney. He grounded our process in ceremony and invited young people to participate. His guidance was invaluable and we are truly thankful for the teachings, prayers, and ceremony. He reminded us that supports for young people need to address their spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental needs.

**Stop removing Indigenous kids from their culture. Create space for healing, for connection. Let kids stay in their communities. And stop moving us around all the time.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

# The Importance of Prevention

Young people described being unhoused as scary and dangerous. Many experienced or witnessed violence and crime, including theft, assault, gang involvement, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence. Others were exposed to substance use, while some were injured due to drug toxicity or exposure to the elements.

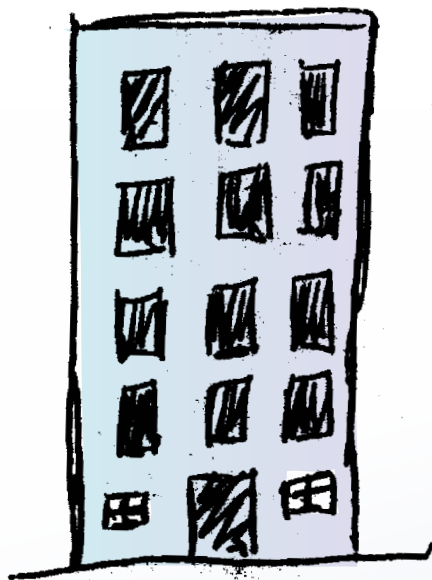
Numerous young people felt bad about the things they had to do to survive, because of the harm they or others suffered. This reinforces the importance of early intervention to prevent youth homelessness.

**I never knew who would show up and I'd always sleep with a weapon and keep mace to protect myself.**

Age of young person: **14**  
First unhoused at age: **12**

**It is a constant panic not to have a house. You are worried about how you will get out of the situation. Worry about where to shower. You're more vulnerable and lonely. It is scary, and there is no one to protect you in that moment except yourself.**

Age of young person: **23**  
First unhoused at age: **12**



**My dad is a very violent person, [I am queer] and my dad struggles with this. I ended up getting a restraining order against my dad due to him being physical with me. After he told me that he was going to kill me, I knew I had to get out.**

Age of young person: **24**  
First unhoused at age: **16**

# Prevention for youth in the care of their families



## What we heard

Many young people became homeless due to family breakdown, often involving conflict, neglect, or needing to escape emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Contributing factors included parents' mental health or substance use challenges, family violence, the death of a caregiver, or young people's sexual or gender identity not being accepted. Sometimes, parents were unable to address young people's complex needs, particularly those with behavioural, mental health, or substance use challenges. These families often faced barriers trying to get help from child-serving systems.

**I was living with my mom and siblings and was being abused so I ran away from home. With help from my school supports I called child intervention for help, but they were no help.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **17**

**In the past my parents have struggled with being on the brink of homeless when they fell behind on rent. Earlier this year we almost lost our home because the landlord kept raising the rent, which added stress for me and my mom.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **8**

**Have families go to counselling together find solutions on how to make it work.**

Age of young person: **16**  
First unhoused at age: **11**

Child Intervention did not consistently intervene when children and youth were unsafe. Without support, situations often deteriorated. Additionally, after young people became unhoused, many did not receive help when they reached out to Child Intervention. Some were told that they had to return to their family home, even though the core issues of why they left were not addressed.

**My dad has always been physically abusive. When I was 14, I fought back and he didn't like that and kicked me out. Since that time, I've been staying with friends, and sometimes at [the youth shelter].**

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **14**

Intergenerational housing instability also had an impact. Often, young people's parents grew up in unstable homes, were in unsafe relationships, or did not have support systems. Many young people first experienced homelessness with their families. For some, their parents were unable to afford or maintain stable housing, while others stayed in shelters. The cycle of housing instability continued for some young people who were experiencing homelessness when they became parents.

**My dad raised me my whole life, but he passed away when I was 16 and I had nowhere to live. I tried to live with family, but they didn't want me, so I started to couch surf.**

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **16**

**My parents had trouble finding a place...and suggested I stay at [the youth shelter] until they could find a place for all of us. My younger siblings needed my parents more.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **20**

## Supporting families



The Government of Alberta has recognized homelessness as “a human tragedy that no one should have to endure.”<sup>17</sup> Our consultations reinforced this and highlighted that young people should never have to go through the stressful and traumatic experiences of being unhoused. They should be free to focus on building healthy and happy futures.

As a society, we must be proactive and prioritize youth homelessness prevention.<sup>18</sup> A key aspect of prevention is providing families with the support they need to create a healthy, stable home life for their children. In Alberta, families rely on community agencies and child-serving systems for help. Finding support is not always easy.

**Support families earlier, so kids don't get pushed out. More mental health and addiction supports for parents.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **14**

Multiple child-serving ministries offer preventative services. Recent changes to funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Services will prioritize more

targeted assistance for families who require intensive support. However, this may mean a reduction in universal prevention programming that focuses on building capacity in families and communities.

When help is delayed until there is a crisis, it is harder to address underlying challenges and repair relationships. Families need access to a robust continuum of both targeted and universal services to maintain stability and prevent family breakdown. By connecting families with the right resources at the right time, many difficulties could be addressed before they escalate and potentially result in youth becoming homeless.

**Universal supports** are preventive services offered to families that help build and strengthen their capacity to care for their children.

**Targeted supports** are provided to families when it has been identified that they may be in crisis or require intensive supports and services to prevent the need for formal intervention or family breakdown.

The Advocate has made recommendations regarding community supports for young people and their families. The Advocate looks forward to seeing more progress.

- Identify the community supports provided to young people and their families.
- Coordinate how services are delivered.
- Strengthen navigation between systems.

- *Calling for Change 2023-2024*<sup>19</sup>



## Housing stability for families

It is crucial to do more to prevent families from becoming unhoused. Failing to do so can have lifelong impacts, as the experience of homelessness in childhood and adolescence may increase the likelihood of housing instability in adulthood.<sup>20</sup> In November 2021, the Government of Alberta released *Stronger Foundations: Alberta's 10-year Strategy to Improve and Expand Affordable Housing*.<sup>21</sup> While progress has been made, recent reporting indicates that thousands of households remain on waitlists for affordable housing units and rent supplements.<sup>22</sup> Despite increased capacity in the housing system, young people and their families continue to face barriers accessing housing supports. Affordable housing is foundational to helping families create a stable home for their children, which is key to preventing homelessness.



**There were a couple of times when I was homeless. When I was in the care of my mom and dad, I grew up in shelters because we struggled to find housing. But mostly I became unhoused by myself when I was 13.**

Age of young person: **16**

First unhoused at age: **13**

In April 2026,

**3,795**

people listed as unhoused and actively seeking housing in Edmonton,

**23.8% (904)**

were under the age of 24.

Of those 904 young people, 672 were dependent children and youth.

- Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2026

## Prevention for youth in the care of Child Intervention

There is a connection between involvement in the child intervention system and homelessness.<sup>23</sup> Data collected from across Canada, indicates that more than a quarter of those experiencing homelessness were previously in the care of child intervention systems.<sup>24</sup> The rate was even higher among Indigenous people, with nearly half (49%) reporting past involvement.<sup>25</sup>

In our engagement, 65% of the young people had involvement with Child Intervention. This underscores the importance of the child intervention system in preventing youth homelessness.





## What we heard

Concerns with child intervention placements came up frequently. Placements that could meet the needs of young people were often not available. Some youth left their placements because they felt unwanted or like they did not belong. Many experienced placement disruptions when they were unable to comply with rules and expectations and when caregivers did not have the capacity to respond to their trauma-based behaviours. Some young people, in the care of Child Intervention, were placed in youth shelters, which at times, exposed them to additional violence and substance use.

**I have actually had a lot of placement breakdowns because I don't have supports. I also have a really bad criminal record which makes it hard for my caseworker to find me a placement. No one wants to help me because I am so close to 18.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **13**

**Why would I feel comfortable staying at a placement or with a family if I know that they think of me in a bad way? I really don't feel like I have support, so it's just easier to do things by myself and with my crew.**

Age of young person: **16**  
First unhoused at age: **13**

Many also discussed the challenges that youth face when they leave care at 18 years old and the need to provide them with more support as they transition to adulthood. There were worries that these youth, who needed more support than their peers, often received less. Young people had to find and maintain their own homes, even when their income was not sufficient to afford rent. For many, this expectation was impossible, and they ended up living in compromised or unsafe conditions. Some lacked the skills to know how to manage their housing and finances, and often had to choose between food, shelter, and other basic needs.

**I can't afford my current rent and no longer have support from my housing/youth worker. Now I am relying on my TAP Practitioner to help me find more affordable housing, but they are told not to drive me and "hold my hand."**

Age of young person: **19**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

**I'd build more low-income housing specifically for youth aging out of care who have no supports.**

Age of young person: **20**  
First unhoused at age: **19**

## Placements

Finding the right placements for young people and providing enough support to maintain them is a critical part of preventing youth homelessness. Unhoused youth who have been in government care often have histories of living in many different placements, which disrupts their relationships with caregivers. Stakeholders and youth shared that placement instability was a common experience among unhoused youth and that these moves were hard on them and impacted their connections with others. While some moves are beyond a young person's control, at times, young people may decide to leave their placements. When this happens, it is important to consider why.

They may leave because they are trying to meet needs that are going unmet, including:<sup>26</sup>

- safety
- independence
- stability
- connection
- a sense of belonging

Placement is also one of our top individual advocacy matters. Matching young people to the living situations they need is complex and requires resources and options that are not always available to caseworkers. Concerns include a lack of appropriate placements that meet young people's needs and placement breakdowns.<sup>27</sup>

The Advocate has made multiple recommendations about placement, including the importance of meeting the specific needs of groups of young people, such as:

- Indigenous youth<sup>28</sup>
- those with complex needs<sup>29</sup>
- and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth<sup>30</sup>

There is currently an outstanding recommendation related to placement for young people with disabilities.<sup>31</sup>

## Transitions to adulthood

In Alberta, youth leaving care are eligible for support through the Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP). The program offers supports related to housing including the possibility of receiving an allocated budget for rent, as well as assistance with housing searches.<sup>32</sup> It was made clear in our consultations that many young people transitioning out of care need more intensive housing supports than are currently being offered. This is particularly important, because they often face additional challenges compared to their peers who did not grow up in care.<sup>33, 34</sup>

It is critical to consider that youth are navigating the transition to adulthood while skills such as planning, decision making and problem-solving are still developing, making it more difficult to maintain a stable home.<sup>35</sup> Most Canadian youth move into adulthood gradually, with family support that allows them to make mistakes, explore career options, and develop independence at their own pace.<sup>36</sup> Supports for youth leaving care must be increased so that their transition to adulthood is similar to young people NOT in government care.

I experienced a lot of abuse from my family so I was brought into care. Growing up, I had many different placements but none of them were a good fit for me. When I was 17, I decided that I wanted to leave, so I left and found myself at a shelter.

Age of young person: 19  
First unhoused at age: 17

**There are two recommendations that remain outstanding related to TAP, and the Advocate looks forward to continued progress, so that young people will have access to the supports they need.**

**In 2024, the Advocate recommended that the Ministry of Children and Family Services review and revise the supports provided under TAP.**

- *Calling for Change 2023-2024*<sup>37</sup>

**In 2025, the Advocate recommended that the TAP policy manual be made publicly available, because it is important that young people know what supports they can receive.**

- *Calling for Change 2024-2025*<sup>38</sup>





In 2021, the Child Welfare League of Canada published *The Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care*.<sup>39</sup>

These were created by Dr. Melanie Doucet and the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, based on feedback from young people

across Canada who had lived experience of being in care. They were developed to provide minimum key standards to ensure young people transitioning out of care receive the same support as their peers. They include access to housing without restrictive conditions, financial supports to cover basic needs, enabling youth to pursue goals outside of survival, and environments that foster personal growth, stability, and a sense of safety and belonging.

These standards have been recognized by leading experts as a valuable framework for addressing youth homelessness.<sup>40</sup> We agree that “every young person should have a place they can call home,”<sup>41</sup> not as a privilege, but as a fundamental right. Given the established link between homelessness and involvement with the child intervention system, it would be beneficial for the equitable standards to be considered in service provision to youth in Alberta who are transitioning out of the care of Child Intervention.

Young people who have not been involved with Child Intervention and who do not have family support are often overlooked. It is hard for them to access adult services that could have prevented homelessness. This gap highlights the need for developmentally responsive services that better support young people as they transition into adulthood and navigate adult systems.

## Interventions When Youth are First Unhoused

Youth and stakeholders described the daily hardships young people face when they are unhoused. They were often in unsafe situations and had high levels of stress and uncertainty. It was a constant challenge to meet their basic needs such as food and shelter, and keep their few belongings safe. This created significant barriers to attending school or finding and maintaining a job. Much of their time was spent trying to navigate services and access resources. Having to focus on survival often left little for anything else. How systems intervene when a young person first becomes unhoused can alter their path and, in many cases, prevent them from becoming entrenched in homelessness.

**I aged out of foster care. When I turned 18, the support from the system stopped. No one told me how to get housing, how to find a job, or even apply for help. I tried my best, but I couldn't keep up with rent.**

Age of young person: **20**  
First unhoused at age: **19**

**Look into the barriers to access AISH, Alberta Works, therapy, and assessments.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **21**



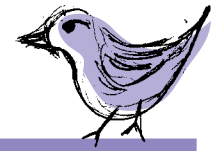
**I wanted to finish school, but I was never in one place long enough, I could move from one end of the city to the other in one night.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **15**



**It is hard struggling to figure out where to go and what to do for everything like clothes and food. I have done some not so good things to get money to afford these basic needs. It's scary out there.**

Age of young person: **16**  
First unhoused at age: **13**



## What we heard

It is critically important to provide unhoused young people with practical supports to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, hygiene, clothing and health care. Not having access to a phone, the internet, personal identification, and secure storage for their belongings made day-to-day living difficult and made it harder to get help.

**I'd make sure there are nice people that go out and check on youth where they're at. I'd also offer cultural supports and healing for Indigenous youth, and make sure we're not treated like criminals for being homeless. Mostly, I'd make sure no one feels alone.**

Age of young person: **17**

First unhoused at age: **14**

In addition, it was also important for them to meet their social, emotional and psychological needs. These include social and cultural connections, and access to recreational opportunities like art, music, or sports. Timely access to formal services, such as mental health and substance use treatment, is also essential. Finding and navigating resources was identified as a major difficulty.

It is imperative that young people are supported to exit homelessness as quickly as possible. The longer a young person is unhoused, the more likely they are to experience trauma and challenges that contribute to increasing entrenchment in homelessness. Some barriers young people faced included difficulties renting accommodations and long waitlists or delays to access affordable, transitional, or supportive housing.

**Government needs to connect kids to friends and relatives. Let them have options, because renting is expensive.**

Age of young person: **17**

First unhoused at age: **15**

Help for young people is most effective when tailored to their developmental needs and unique circumstances. Having a spectrum of supports was essential, from outreach and drop-ins to service hubs and wrap-around programming. It mattered to young people when staff had flexible approaches, listened to their perspectives, took the time to build relationships, and made them feel seen and cared for.

Having dedicated professionals who connected them to services and to their families and natural supports was extremely important.

**I don't have a stable income so no landlord will rent to me. I'm on waitlists for housing through the government, but I've been waiting for years. Everything takes too long here, as there are not enough resources and services.**

Age of young person: **24**

First unhoused at age: **16**

## Supports tailored to young people

Many young people who are unhoused experience physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect, have been victims of crime, or have been targeted for human trafficking.<sup>42</sup> Our consultations highlighted that they were constantly on alert for physical dangers and were worried about finding enough food and a safe place to stay. Homelessness is chronically stressful. This type of stress puts the brain in a constant state of survival.<sup>43</sup> Over time, this toxic stress can disrupt brain development, causing long-lasting and life-changing effects.<sup>44</sup>

The constant challenge to meet basic needs, along with ongoing exposure to physical and emotional harm, is profoundly detrimental to young people's well-being. It also undermines their ability to move forward and change their circumstances. Not only do young people need support to meet their basic needs when they become unhoused, but there must also be an immediate focus on helping them exit homelessness. Evidence suggests that individuals unhoused as young people are more likely to experience chronic homelessness in adulthood.<sup>45</sup> To prevent short-term homelessness from becoming long-term, we must intervene quickly and effectively.<sup>46</sup>



Dr. Stephen Gaetz, president of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, along with other experts, identified guiding principles on preventing youth homelessness, which highlight the importance of providing services that respond to the developmental needs of young people.<sup>47</sup>

- *Housing stabilization with no preconditions;*
- *Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination;*
- *Positive youth development and wellness orientation;*
- *Individualized, client-driven supports that are equitable and culturally appropriate;*
- *Social inclusion and community integration;*
- *Connection to family and natural supports;*
- *Cross-systems collaboration and accountability;*
- *Grounding prevention in human rights.*

(Guiding Principles for Youth Homelessness Prevention [Gaetz et al., 2024])

Further to what we heard, there must be a spectrum of supports, from outreach and drop-in programs to service hubs. To address youth homelessness in Alberta, it is critical that we meet young people where they are at, including those who are not connected to shelters or other child-serving systems. To provide effective services, we must first understand the extent of youth homelessness. This needs to be grounded in robust data collection. Currently, provincial tracking of youth homelessness is limited. Data is collected from youth shelters but does not include young people who do not access those services.

**Please see if there is more you can do for young people on the street. Youth are the future and they need investment. If there is not more support, do not be surprised in 20 years if adults are struggling because they did not get what they needed when they were young.**

Age of young person: 17  
First unhoused at age: 2 or 3

## Shelter services

Shelters serve a unique role in connecting with young people when they are first unhoused. As we consider the prevention of youth homelessness, we must look at the services provided in shelters. These services must have the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to address the immediate crisis and prevent long-term homelessness.



### What we heard

Many young people needed to utilize supports from youth shelters. These spaces provided safety, stabilization, and connection to resources. However, this did not come without challenges. Some were hesitant to go to shelters because of stigma and the exposure to violence, substance use, and others more entrenched in homelessness.

**I would make sure all the services are well known within the community and streamline the process to make it easy. The waitlists are also too long, so we are stuck staying in bad situations.**

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

There were also barriers to accessing shelters, especially when guardian consent was required, or when the rules and expectations were hard to follow. Some shelters had limited services during the day or did not have sufficient capacity to meet demand and had to turn youth away. For many young people, getting a bed in the shelter and connecting with staff was critical to getting help and addressing their immediate needs.

On their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, age restrictions forced them to enter the adult shelter system, where they were more vulnerable and felt unsafe. Adult shelters often have larger numbers of people in one space, many of whom may have significant entrenchment in homelessness, which can negatively impact young people.

**Building trust with youth and creating enough shelters they can come back to would save so many people from so much pain. When I was homeless. I felt worthless and unwanted. Having nowhere to go reinforces the belief that I'm equivalent to the litter someone throws on the sidewalk. Give us somewhere to go and someone to believe in us. That's all I ever needed.**

Age of young person: **20**  
First unhoused at age: **17**

## Connection to resources and age-appropriate shelter supports

Shelters not only provide a safe place to sleep but also serve as a crucial pathway out of homelessness. Shelters must have the capacity to connect young people with the support they need, such as housing, mental health, substance use, or disability services. This can be challenging due to waitlists and limited capacity within systems. It is important to examine how these supports are provided in youth shelters, as well as after young people turn 18. We heard that after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, young people had fewer opportunities to access age-appropriate services because they had to move to adult shelters that did not recognize their unique developmental stage. It is crucial that young adults from 18 to 24 years old have access to shelter services that meet their developmental needs and connect them to resources.

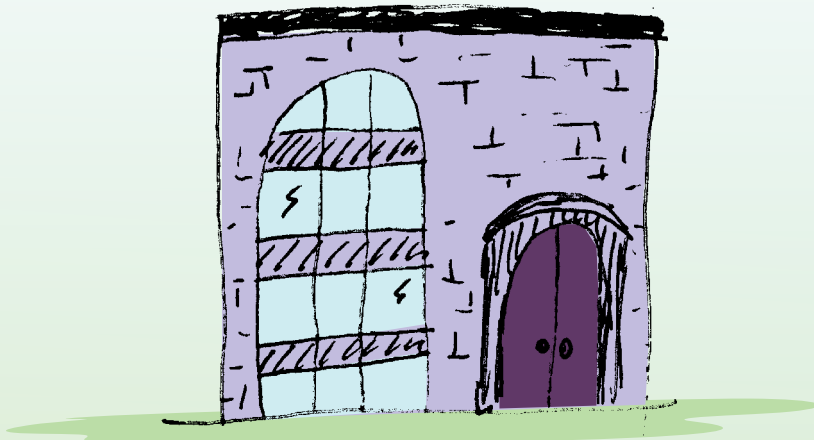


An important way some shelters in Alberta assist young people is by connecting them with family and natural supports. These connections can help prevent or end youth homelessness by strengthening young people's relationships with adults who care about them.<sup>48</sup> We heard about how isolated and alone young people felt when unhoused, and the importance of having relationships that gave them a sense of belonging. However, these

**I would make sure unhoused youth have safe places to go - like shelters that are open 24/7, welcoming, and made for young people. I'd provide access to food, showers, clothes, mental health care, and people who truly care... No one should feel alone or invisible just because they don't have a home.**

Age of young person: **20**  
First unhoused at age: **12**

relationships may be complex and need to be built carefully. This is important work that requires staff to have enough dedicated time and training to learn the necessary skills.<sup>49</sup> Stakeholders told us that there can be financial barriers to building these connections, requiring access to short-term, flexible, and discretionary funds, which are often not available. The work of connecting young people to natural supports must be prioritized and adequately funded to support them during this vulnerable developmental period.



# Places to Belong: Long-Term Stability

Young people described how when they were unhoused, they often felt hopeless, like they were trapped, unable to move forward, and described feeling lonely, abandoned, and having a loss of identity or belonging. Many experienced an escalation of substance use and negative impacts on their mental health. They frequently felt shame or dehumanized, like there was a stigma attached to being homeless. They thought others blamed them for their circumstances.

Be gentle and patient with these kids, they are scared, confused and worry they won't make it.

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **16**

When we look at building long-term stability, it is important to consider the emotional trauma young people suffered when they were homeless. Healing takes time. It is vital that housing-based supports be sustained long enough to move beyond survival.



You end up living the same day over and over again, you sleep, you wake up, and hope to make enough money to survive, you sleep and wake up again, hoping for enough.

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **15 or 16**

## What we heard

Young people often cycle in and out of homelessness. They sometimes returned to their family home, but then had to leave again due to abuse, neglect, or conflict. Others were removed from Child Intervention placements that could not respond effectively to their complex needs. Some had to leave their accommodations due to safety concerns, or they were evicted because they could not afford rent and had difficulty following rules.

**Maintaining housing is difficult. People expect homeless people to suddenly adjust to how to be a person again. The skills on the streets aren't applicable to regular life.**

Age of young person: **22**  
First unhoused at age: **18 or 19**

Once they became housed, they were often treated as though they should be fully independent, when they still needed mentorship and individualized supports to help prevent homelessness from recurring. Youth faced unrealistic expectations that set them up for failure. There was a lack of support with general problem-solving, building essential life skills, and understanding tenant rights and responsibilities. They would have benefited from more assistance connecting with services, such as mental health and substance use treatment, and moving forward with educational and employment goals.

**Have apartment complexes for youth with services on site, help with jobs, help with life skills.**

Age of young person: **19**  
First unhoused at age: **12**

Young people typically had low incomes and could not afford to cover both rent and other necessities. While private rentals may have worked well for some, others required housing programs with built-in supports. It was highlighted that having timely access to a spectrum of different types of housing is crucial. Many spoke of the need to increase the availability of affordable units, Housing First<sup>i</sup> options, as well as transitional and supportive housing.

It was emphasized that housing should be tailored to the specific developmental needs of youth and include a range of alternatives to meet their diverse needs. This should include environments designed to respond to the needs of young people with mental health and substance use challenges. Cultural safety should also be a priority, and there should be options geared towards different groups, such as those who are parents, who have disabilities, who have had justice involvement, or are part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Young people reminded us that they need more than just four walls and a place to sleep, they need a home where they feel that they belong. Having a nurturing home environment, one that allows them to build healthy relationships and feel connected to a supportive community, is instrumental in creating a positive sense of identity and long-term stability.

Staff turnover negatively affected young people because they needed consistent support from experienced professionals.

**It felt like you had to be this perfect version of yourself to deserve help. There's no room to make mistakes. If you mess up even once, you lose everything. Landlords are the worst. So mistrustful just because I am young, never mind if they happen to find out anything about your background and being in care.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

**I got an apartment, but the pipe burst, and I had to leave. I took over a lease, but my credit dropped when I left. Found another place but left because they were giving out drugs.**

Age of young person: **21**  
First unhoused at age: **15**

**You should always be in a place to be able to learn from past experiences, not just kicked out without a chance to learn.**

Age of young person: **18**  
First unhoused at age: **11**

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i Housing First focuses on moving individuals experiencing homelessness into housing and then providing any necessary supports and services. The underlying principle is that they are better able to move forward in their lives once they are housed.



## A spectrum of housing support

It is important to recognize that exiting homelessness can be a complex process that extends beyond becoming housed.<sup>50</sup> Consistent with key themes raised by youth and stakeholders, research suggests that providing young people with individualized, wraparound support alongside housing can help facilitate long-term stability.<sup>51</sup> Flexible approaches, trusting relationships with staff, and connections to services, such as mental health and substance use supports, are key components for success.<sup>52</sup> Housing supports must recognize the individual needs of young people and align with their developmental stage.

Youth and stakeholders highlighted the need to belong. This is also reflected in research which has found that having a sense of belonging can promote housing stability.<sup>53</sup> Youth benefit from:

- emotional support and trusted relationships;
- support with education and staying in school;
- job training and employment opportunities;
- life skills development (budgeting, cooking, navigating services); and,
- mentorship and guidance during transitions to adulthood.

**Kids don't just need a place to sleep and a roof over their head, so they don't get wet. We're not dogs. We need a real home and people who won't give up on us.**

Age of young person: **17**  
First unhoused at age: **14**

Alongside practical assistance, supporting young people to cultivate a positive sense of identity can help prevent them from cycling back into homelessness.<sup>54</sup> It is important to have housing supports that can address the needs of diverse groups of young people.

These should reflect the unique experiences of individuals who may be marginalized because of ability, race, gender, or sexuality.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the experiences of Indigenous people must be considered, along with how services can support spiritual healing and connection to community.<sup>56</sup> Meeting diverse needs requires a wide range of housing alternatives, not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is important to have a continuum of housing options for young people.

The current availability is unable to meet demand. There are excellent examples within Alberta of housing programs supporting young people who have exited homelessness, including transitional housing, Housing First for Youth, and supportive housing.

**I should not starve myself to keep a roof over my head.**

**I should not cry when I think about my life.**

**Everyone has a right to live their life.**

**This shouldn't be so hard.**

Age of young person: **18**

First unhoused at age: **17**

Young people and stakeholders told us that these types of programs work, and more are urgently needed. There must be an expansion of the youth housing spectrum, with special attention to increasing the options available for young people tailored to their unique needs.



# Conclusion

There is tremendous expertise within our province that can be leveraged to strengthen an Alberta-specific response to youth homelessness. Excellent evidence-based initiatives are already underway. The next step is to increase these efforts so that there is capacity to support all young people who need it. To do this effectively, data collection on youth homelessness must be expanded to help inform planning and decision-making. It is also essential that young people with lived experience are at the forefront of shaping Alberta's response to youth homelessness. They are remarkably insightful and their wisdom is invaluable.

Youth homelessness must be prevented. Child-serving systems need to do more to support families so that they can create stable, nurturing home environments. This includes providing prevention and early intervention services as well as increasing access to affordable housing. However, when there are safety concerns, Child Intervention must be able to intervene promptly and, when necessary, provide young people with placements that meet their needs and give them a sense of belonging. Then, as they transition to adulthood from being in care, young people need more hands-on support to find and maintain housing and become successful adults.

It is critical to respond quickly when young people become unhoused. Trauma, lack of connection, and the inability to find their way to stability can contribute to chronic homelessness and must be addressed. This requires enhancing shelter capacity to work more closely with youth, including efforts to connect them to family and natural supports. It also involves increasing the availability of affordable and supportive housing options beyond emergency shelters. Once young people become housed, they must have access to a spectrum of supports that can be tailored to their individual needs, to prevent them from cycling back into homelessness.

Young people need safety and a sense of belonging. They are at a pivotal stage in their development, when they should be focused on planning for their futures, rather than on survival and meeting their basic needs. Housing for youth is a fundamental human right, and as a province, we can and must do better.

**Being unhoused as a young person isn't just about not having a roof. It's about feeling forgotten, unseen, and left behind at a time in life when we're supposed to be figuring out who we are and where we belong. Many of us didn't choose this. We aged out of systems, ran from unsafe homes, lost support, or just slipped through the cracks. And once you're out there, it's really hard to come back in. What we need most isn't just a bed for the night. We need someone to walk with us, to believe in us, give us second chances, and fight for solutions that work for our lives.**

Age of young person: **20**

First unhoused at age: **19**

# Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Children and Family Services and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction should collaborate to develop a provincial youth-specific homelessness strategy designed to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness that includes increased data collection and public reporting.

## Further comments

The strategy should:

- Be designed to meet the needs of young people up to 24 years old.
- Expand data collection to better capture prevalence and experiences of unhoused young people, including those not accessing shelters.
- Focus on prevention, early intervention, and housing stability.
- Outline a continuum of housing options from transitional to supportive housing in communities across the province.
- Identify specific actions to support safe, planned, and well-supported transitions from youth to adult serving systems and programs.
- Embed culturally appropriate and responsive approaches for Indigenous and other disproportionately affected young people.
- Include clear goals, timelines and public reporting on progress.

## Expected outcomes

- Improved understanding of the prevalence, pathways, and duration of youth homelessness.
- More coordinated prevention-focused planning, service coordination, and policy development across systems.
- Young people receive a more comprehensive and coordinated range of services to prevent and address homelessness.

2. The Ministry of Children and Family Services, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, and the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Status of Women should publicly report on their efforts to collaborate and coordinate to help prevent youth homelessness. This should include how they are ensuring a robust continuum of universal and targeted prevention, early intervention, and intensive supports for families.

**Further comments**

- Families require timely access to a coordinated range of support that will be available within their community.
- The Ministries should publicly identify coordination efforts to provide families with a comprehensive continuum of support.

**Expected outcomes**

- Families have the support they need to create a healthy, stable home life for their children which will help prevent youth homelessness.
- Families are supported during times of crisis.
- Public reporting of coordination efforts will strengthen the understanding of the continuum of community-based support available to families.

**3. The Ministry of Children and Family Services should align the housing supports currently provided under the Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP) with the housing pillar from the *Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care*.**

**Further comments**

- The *Equitable Standards* provide a framework to help ensure that all young adults transitioning from care can expect equitable, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate support, including housing.
- The Ministry should review how the current TAP housing supports compare with the housing pillar of the *Equitable Standards*.
- There is an evaluation model available for the *Equitable Standards* which may assist with this review and alignment.<sup>57</sup>
- The Ministry should publicly identify actions required to align the TAP's housing supports with the *Equitable Standards*.

**Expected outcomes**

- Young adults receiving services through TAP will be provided equitable, coordinated, and developmentally appropriate housing supports.
- Public alignment of youth housing supports with the *Equitable Standards* strengthens transparency in TAP and commitment to continuous improvement in services for young people.

**4. The Ministry of Children and Family Services should increase the capacity within youth shelters to provide specialized support that helps young people build and maintain healthy relationships with their family and natural supports.**

**Further comments**

- Young people who are unhoused often experience disrupted or strained relationships and require support to build and maintain healthy connections.
- Youth shelters are a key point of contact and opportunity to support young people in strengthening their connection to family and natural supports.
- Strengthening these connections may include finding family and natural supports, facilitating dispute resolution, and providing mentorship to help young people develop relationship skills.
- Specialized training and resource capacity within youth shelters are required to effectively do this complex work.

**Expected outcomes**

- Youth shelters have the funding and resources to support young people in building and maintaining healthy relationships with their family and natural supports.
- More young people are connected to family and natural supports.
- Strengthened connections contribute to reduced duration and recurrence of youth homelessness.

# Appendix 1: Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care: Housing Pillar

*The circles and systems that care for youth in and from care should foster the following key housing supports:*

- *Housing First for Youth in Care program (e.g., aligned with HF4Y\* best practice)*
- *Accessible, safe, legal and affordable housing reflecting local realities*
- *Non-discriminatory subsidized housing options, including non-single room occupancy (SRO) options*
- *Option to live with and/or visit parents who live in subsidized housing*
- *Option to continue to live with and/or visit foster parents*
- *Animal-friendly housing*
- *Choice and voice in housing options, including which neighbourhood to live in*
- *Supports in apartment viewings (i.e., having someone accompany youth to view housing options, getting transportation to viewings)*
- *Storage space*
- *Housing-related skills training (e.g., cleaning, laundry, child-proofing)*
- *New furniture and kitchen essentials (e.g., cutlery, plates, glasses, pots, pans)*
- *New appliances in cases where they are not provided by the landlord*
- *Tenant rights and appeals process training*
- *Eviction prevention (e.g., eviction/homeless prevention program with wraparound services, targeted to youth in care)*
- *Access to a housing advocate and legal representative who understand youth in care realities and can advocate on their behalf*
- *All housing set up costs covered (deposits, utilities, internet, phone, etc.)*
- *Assistance with learning how to set-up and pay monthly bills, which provider and plans to choose*
- *Agency acting as co-signer on lease or housing reference as necessary*
- *Luggage set*
- *Moving costs and fees covered (e.g., packing supplies, moving vehicle rental, movers, etc.)*
- *Ongoing funding for basic necessities (e.g., toilet paper, hygiene items, laundry detergent, towels)*
- *Emergency Kit provided (e.g., candles, flashlight, water, clothes, canned food, bandages, emergency blanket, fire extinguisher)*
- *Training on healthy living skills and creating a safe space at home (e.g., boundary-setting with guests, how to communicate with landlord)*

*\* Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a program developed by A Way Home Canada, and includes a Program Model Guide, Operations Manual and Tools & Templates.*

(Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care [Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2021])

# Appendix 2: Expert Panel Members

## Elder Theodore (Ted) Quinney

Elder Theodore (Ted) Quinney has his master's degree in education and has worked countless years in the public service sector. Ted is connected to his indigenous culture and walks his path on the red road with grace. He is a pipe and sweat lodge holder and holds a good reputation in the community as someone who comes from their heart and conducts himself in ceremony every day. He is Cree from Frog Lake First Nation in Treaty 6 and follows the Cree teachings.

## Dr. Stephen Gaetz

Dr. Stephen Gaetz is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, in Toronto Canada. He is the President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Homeless Hub at York University as well as co-Director of Making the Shift – Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and the United Nations Economic Commission Toronto Centre of Excellence on Youth Homelessness Prevention. In 2017 Dr. Gaetz was awarded the Member of the Order of Canada.

As an internationally recognized leader and innovator Dr. Gaetz has had a long-standing interest in understanding homelessness – its causes, how it is experienced, and potential solutions. A major transformational focus of his work has been to help shift public thinking and investment to support the prioritization of the prevention of homelessness. His program of research has been defined by his desire to 'make research matter' through working in partnership to conduct and mobilize rigorous scholarly research that contributes not only to our knowledge base on homelessness but also to solutions to homelessness that impact on policy, practice and public opinion. Through his expertise in knowledge mobilization he has pioneered efforts to bring together researchers, practitioners, policy makers, service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness to participate in a broad agenda of community engaged scholarship and knowledge creation designed to contribute to solutions to homelessness.

## Autumn Sampson (she/her)

Autumn Sampson is a youth engagement and systems advocacy professional, based in Edmonton, Alberta. With over four years of experience in systems advocacy, facilitation, and policy consultation, she works to meaningfully embed youth voice into child welfare and government decision-making processes. Autumn has participated in provincial and national policy initiatives, supported rights education, engaged with government leaders and stakeholders, and contributed to public reports, media discussions, and conference panels to advance inclusive engagement practices. Drawing on lived experience and a strong rights-based, trauma-informed lens, she is particularly passionate about improving equitable outcomes for racialized and marginalized young people involved with government systems.

Autumn has previously served as a member of the OCYA investigative review committees and currently works as the Youth Engagement Intern with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. She continues to advocate for meaningful youth participation in systems change through her involvement in provincial and national councils and initiatives focused on improving outcomes for youth in care.

## **Tanya Wald**

Tanya Wald is the Executive Director of Sunrise House, a role she has held for the past 15 years. With a Master of Social Work degree and more than two decades of experience in the sector, Tanya is recognized as a trusted leader in youth homelessness prevention and community-based service innovation. Under her leadership, Sunrise House constructed a new integrated facility that brings together prevention-focused programs and coordinated supports designed to strengthen early intervention and long-term stability for young people. A committed advocate, Tanya is widely regarded as a collaborative community builder whose leadership has helped shape regional strategies addressing the root causes of youth homelessness.

## **Zoie Greiner**

Zoie Greiner brings a powerful blend of lived experience, youth-work expertise, and community leadership. A survivor of sexual exploitation, early exposure to addiction, and domestic violence that led to homelessness, she has dedicated her adult life to healing and supporting others. Her 20-year background in Dance As Medicine and performance mindset coaching eventually expanded into harm-reduction, and outreach work with groups like the Fringe Festival, 4B Harm Reduction, and the Bear Clan Patrol. Guided by frontline experience at Lionsheart Wellness, and cultural learnings directly from Elders in both a professional and personal setting, Zoie now serves in her dream role as a Life Skills Coach with Encompass's NOVA transitional housing program, grounding her work in empathy, authenticity, and belief in every young person's potential.

## **Janet Stewart**

Janet Stewart has worked in the human services field supporting youth and young adults for over 30 years. Janet is currently a Director of Programs with Wood's Homes, a Calgary-based mental health centre that provides treatment and support for children, young people, adults and families. Janet has been with Wood's Homes as a crisis counsellor, an intensive treatment and walk-in single session therapy clinician and in management since 2003. As both a registered psychologist and director, she is responsible for program development and service delivery at an all-ages community mental health hub, a service delivery hub-model program for youth and young adults up to 29 years old, and a family services collaborative program. Janet's areas of professional interest are using hub models/one-stop shops to build healthy communities for youth and young adults, the development of effective mental health system navigation, and the inclusion of single session walk-in therapy as part of a strong mental health system of care.

## **Sam Karanja**

Sam Karanja has worked with Boyle Street for over 10 years and is currently a Program Manager with the Ubuntu Children & Families CSD program. He holds a Master's in Leadership degree from Trinity Western University. He started as a front-line youth worker and is passionate about working with youth and young adults. Sam values listening to youth's experiences and tailoring program practices to methods that work for them. He works with youth experiencing anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD, BPD, FASD and psychosis to help support them attain stable incomes, safe housing, community connection, employment skills, and a sense of wellbeing.

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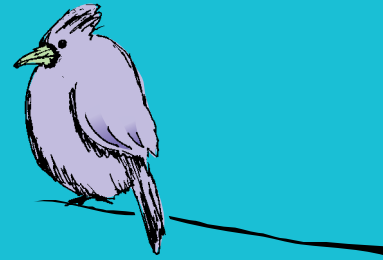
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# Appendix 4: Endnotes

- 1 Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2021
- 2 Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2022
- 3 Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.
- 4 United Nations, 2015
- 5 United Nations, 1989
- 6 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2026
- 7 This range was taken from point-in-time counts from five Alberta communities that reported on youth homelessness, and the methodology used may vary.
  - Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2024
  - City of Grande Prairie, 2024
  - City of Lethbridge, 2024
  - City of Red Deer, 2024
  - Homeward Trust, 2024
- 8 Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, n.d.
- 9 Government of Alberta, 2015
- 10 Community and Social Services, 2022
- 11 United Nations, 1989
- 12 PolicyWise for Children & Families, 2025
- 13 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, n.d.a
- 14 Infrastructure Canada, 2024
- 15 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2017 & OCYA, 2019
- 16 An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, SC 2019, c 24
- 17 Community and Social Services, 2022
- 18 Gaetz et al., 2024
- 19 Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, 2024a
- 20 Parpouchi, Moniruzzaman, & Somers, 2021
- 21 Alberta Seniors and Housing, 2021
- 22 Seniors, Community and Social Services, 2025
- 23 Bonakdar et al., 2023
- 24 Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2025
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39 Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2021  
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43 Rosenzweig & Sundborg, 2022  
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54 Thulien et al, 2019  
55 Buccieri et al., 2023  
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57 Doucet & National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, 2022



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