

# A Place to Belong

A SPECIAL REPORT ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ALBERTA



This report highlights what we heard from young people with lived experience of homelessness and stakeholders from communities across Alberta. Their voices, combined with research and leading practices, reinforce a clear message: youth homelessness is preventable, and every young person deserves a safe place to call home and the opportunity to thrive.

Young people  
consulted **156**

Stakeholders  
consulted **170**

Recommendations  
made **4**

Participants shared the realities of youth homelessness and identified the changes needed to better support young people before, during, and after experiences of homelessness. Young people described homelessness as frightening, isolating, and traumatic, with lasting impacts on their well-being, education, employment, and relationships.

At the same time, they highlighted what makes a difference: early intervention, safe and affordable housing, trusted relationships, culturally responsive services, and individualized, wraparound supports that foster long-term stability and belonging.

**"Youth homelessness is not just about not having a place to stay. It's about feeling forgotten, unsafe, and alone."**

**- Young Person**

Preventing youth homelessness requires more than responding once a young person has lost their housing. It requires investing in prevention by strengthening families, improving transitions from government care, expanding youth-focused housing options, and ensuring young people receive coordinated supports throughout their journey. Together, these actions can help reduce youth homelessness and create pathways to long-term stability.

# Support for Families

For many young people, homelessness began with family breakdown. Participants described experiences of abuse, neglect, family conflict, housing instability, and parents struggling with mental health, substance use, or financial hardship. Others experienced homelessness alongside their families before becoming unhoused on their own.

**“Support families earlier, so kids don’t get pushed out.”**  
– Young Person

# Child Intervention and Transitions to Adulthood

Many participants described instability while involved with Child Intervention, including multiple placement changes, difficulty finding homes that met their needs, and aging out of care without adequate supports.

Young people shared that turning 18 often meant losing critical services before they were ready to live independently. Many struggled to secure affordable housing while balancing school, employment, and basic living expenses. Participants emphasized the importance of stable placements, stronger transition planning, life skills development, and continued housing support beyond age 18.

**“When I turned 18, the support from the system stopped.”**  
– Young Person



# Responding When Youth Become Homeless

Young people described homelessness as frightening, exhausting, and isolating. Daily survival often meant finding food, shelter, and safety while navigating complex systems with limited resources. Long waitlists, lack of affordable housing, and barriers to accessing services made it difficult to exit homelessness quickly.

Participants highlighted the importance of youth-focused shelters, outreach services, trusted adults, and flexible, relationship-based approaches that recognize the unique needs of young people. They emphasized that responding quickly when a young person first becomes unhoused can prevent long-term homelessness.

**“Give us somewhere to go and someone to believe in us.”**  
– Young Person

## Building Long-Term Stability

Young people consistently reminded us that housing alone is not enough. While having a safe place to live is essential, maintaining housing requires ongoing support, stable relationships, and opportunities to build confidence and independence.

Participants described the importance of wraparound supports that include mental health services, education, employment assistance, life-skills development, cultural connections, and mentorship. They also emphasized the need for a broader range of affordable, transitional, supportive, and Housing First options that reflect the diverse needs of Alberta’s youth.

Long-term stability comes from creating places where young people feel safe, supported, and connected—not simply housed.

**“We need a real home and people who won’t give up on us.”**  
– Young Person

# Moving Forward

**Ending youth homelessness requires coordinated action across government, communities, and service providers. Young people emphasized that prevention, early intervention, and long-term supports are essential to ensuring every young person has a safe place to call home.**

**The Advocate is making four recommendations to strengthen Alberta's response to youth homelessness.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 1**

Develop a coordinated, youth-specific strategy that focuses on preventing, reducing, and ending youth homelessness. The strategy should strengthen data collection, improve service coordination, expand housing options, and establish clear goals and public reporting to measure progress.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

Increase collaboration across ministries to ensure families have timely access to community-based prevention services, affordable housing, mental health supports, and other resources that help prevent family breakdown and keep young people safely housed whenever possible.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

Align housing supports provided through Alberta's Transition to Adulthood Program (TAP) with the Equitable Standards for Transitions to Adulthood for Youth in Care. Young people leaving government care should receive developmentally appropriate housing, financial assistance, and ongoing supports comparable to those available to their peers.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Increase the capacity of youth shelters to provide specialized supports that help young people strengthen relationships with family and trusted adults while connecting them to housing, mental health services, education, employment, and community resources that promote long-term stability.

