

Fact Sheet #3

Homelessness in Canada takes an enormous toll

Shelter is a basic need, yet for too many Canadians, it is a scramble every night to secure a place to rest. Many more are at risk of homelessness because of the high cost of shelter, meagre stock of affordable housing, inadequate incomes, and family violence and illness. Support services such as mental health facilities or child welfare agencies can actually create homelessness when programs discharge people with no place to go. Creative solutions in Canadian communities have started to make a difference in reducing homelessness, yet more must be done to improve the supply of affordable housing and needed support services.

Upwards of 200,000 Canadians experience homeless each year

- According to the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, at least 200,000 Canadians access emergency shelters or sleep outside each year. Of this number, 4,000 to 8,000 are chronically homeless, 6,000 to 22,000 move in and out of homelessness, while 176,000 to 188,000 experience homelessness for a short period time.²⁴
- On any given night, 30,000 people are homeless, lodging in shelters or temporary institutional accommodations such as hospitals, or sleeping outside. In addition, an estimated 50,000 are the “hidden homeless,” individuals and families who move from place to place, “couch surfing,” or who are staying in other short-term housing arrangements.²⁵

Tallying the costs of homelessness

- The status quo costs a great deal – both for the people who experience homelessness and for society. The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that the total annual cost of homelessness to the Canadian economy is \$7.05 billion, including the cost of emergency shelters, social services, health care, and corrections.²⁸
- Housing people is more effective and far cheaper than simply providing emergency supports. A 2008 study of four major Canadian cities found that the cost of housing someone in a hospital or prison was between \$66,000 and \$120,000 per year, while the cost of an emergency shelter bed was between \$13,000 and \$42,000. The cost of supportive housing was much lower again, ranging from \$13,000 to \$18,000 per year.²⁹

Many Canadians are homeless or living in unaffordable housing

Number of households spending more than 30% of income on housing:

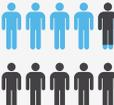
13.1 Million

That's 1 in 4 

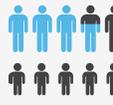


At least **30,000** are homeless on a given night
As many as **50,000** may be "hidden homeless"

Who lives in unaffordable housing?

41% 
of single-person households

40% 
of renters

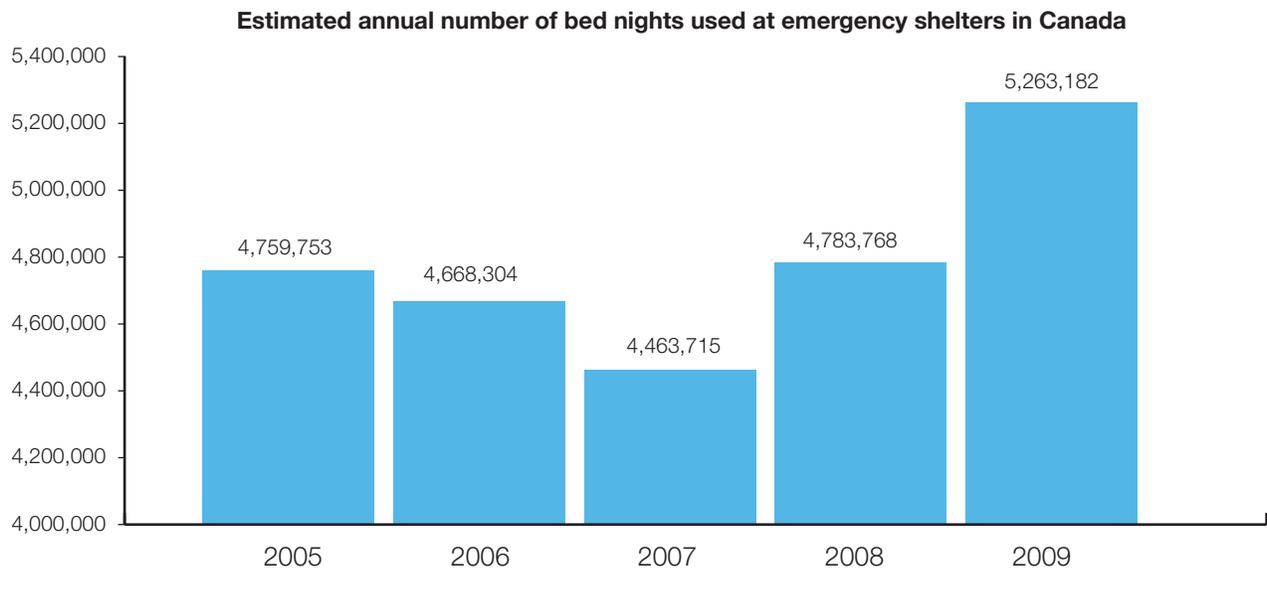
36% 
of lone-parent families

Source: Statistics Canada, National Household Survey 2011. Catalogue Number 99-014-X2011031; Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter and Gulliver (2013), The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013.

Single adult men and young people make up the largest groups of the homeless

- Single adult men aged 25 to 55 years account for almost half (47.5%) of the homeless population in Canada who access emergency shelters. This group makes up the largest proportion of the chronic homeless population according to the National Shelter Study.²⁶
- Young people aged 16 to 24 comprise about 20% – roughly 30,000 annually. These young people face significant difficulties, often coming from homes where there has been family conflict, neglect, and poverty.
- Over time there has been a shift in composition of those turning to shelters, especially with respect to children and families. This group experienced the largest increase in shelter use between 2005 and 2009, with the number of children growing by over 50% to 9,459.
- Aboriginal people are also significantly overrepresented among the homeless, especially in western and northern communities.²⁷ The experiences of chronic poverty and intergenerational trauma have taken an enormous toll on Aboriginal peoples, resulting in an extremely high risk of homelessness.

Economic recession linked to sharp rise in use of emergency shelters



Source: A. Segart (2012), The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009.