

Houses Are More Than Homes: How Housing Programs Improve Community Safety

Did You Know?

- A nation-wide study called "At Home/ Chez Soi" looked at the impact of housing mentally ill homeless Canadians, and the costs of homelessness. The National Film Board mapped out the impressive project:
athome.nfb.ca



- John Howard Societies across Ontario provide assistance finding housing to those in need in their communities. Find the office closest to you:
www.johnhoward.on.ca

Nobody chooses to become homeless. People of all ages and diverse backgrounds make up Canada's homeless population: a youth fleeing an abusive home, an unemployed business person who lost her life savings in the recession, or an elderly individual with no family or pension. No one imagines that they will wind up living on the streets.

Social factors, such as poverty, unemployment and unaffordable housing, and **individual factors**, such as mental illness or marital breakdown, increase a person's chance of becoming homeless.

Once a person becomes homeless, other challenges add up. Health problems, victimization, addiction and getting arrested are all outcomes associated with homelessness. If homeless people are not housed, it becomes nearly impossible for them to deal with their other issues.



This is why the **Housing First** school of thought argues that the first step to dealing with homelessness is getting people immediately into safe and stable housing¹. This approach is fairly straightforward, but it is not easy. The lack of affordable housing stock in Canada makes this critical first step difficult for many homeless persons and well-intentioned service providers alike.

The second step, once a person is housed, is providing him/her individualized treatment and supports in the new housing to help the individual successfully transition out of homelessness for good. This may sound counterintuitive; if a person is 'housed' then they are no longer homeless, right? Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Unless the factors that lead to homelessness mentioned above are addressed, the risk of becoming homeless again will not disappear. This is why service providers like the John Howard Society focus on getting people housed and then building a support plan.

Support plans are unique to each individual. They take into account each person's specific needs, such as employment readiness, life skills training, mental health or addictions issues, and outline goals and strategies for dealing with these needs. For homeless individuals who have been involved in the justice system, finding housing and stability is all the more challenging.

Who are we?

"Effective, just, and humane responses to crime and its causes"

The John Howard Society of Ontario supports our 19 Affiliates through research, policy and program development. We strive to offer the most effective service possible to our clients and their families and contribute to the health, well-being and safety of communities.

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Further Reading:

1. *Housing First.*

www.homelesshub.ca/topics/housing-first-209.aspx

2. Stephen Gaetz. 2012. *The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing?* Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

After Jail: Now What?

Imagine you are leaving a jail. It's in the middle of nowhere, with no regular bus or transit service. It's almost dark out. You have \$25.00 in your pocket. Your I.D. was stolen weeks ago. Your family lives far away, and they probably don't want to hear from you anyway. You are not familiar with your surroundings. You don't have a phone. What do you do? Where do you go?



Studies have shown that homeless people are more likely to be incarcerated. Being in jail also increases the likelihood for people who did have housing to leave jail homeless. If people leave jail homeless, they'll either end up on the streets or in shelters, and probably in situations that got them into trouble to begin with. This is why having housing plans for recently released prisoners is so important. If society wants to prevent crime and reduce homelessness, there needs to be an investment in transitional housing programs and affordable housing stock.

Transitional Housing Programs: Transitional housing programs offer homeless clients housing units in addition to intensive support services. Program staff work with clients to help them transition to safe and stable permanent housing. They offer assistance with finances, life skills (e.g. budgeting, cooking), employment training, and of course, finding suitable housing. Typically transitional housing programs aim to have clients permanently housed within 1-2 years of commencing the program.

Why Addressing Homelessness Should Matter to You

Studies have suggested that the costs associated with homelessness in Canada amount to at least \$4.5-\$6 billion dollars a year². This massive amount of money comes from costs associated with emergency hospital visits, shelters, policing and incarceration, among others. Not dealing with homelessness is costing us—financially and socially.

Housing programs based on **Housing First** models work to address the root causes of homelessness so that it is prevented in the future. Similarly, providing transitional housing to homeless people leaving jail reduces the likelihood that they will re-offend in the future, thereby improving community safety while saving taxpayer dollars at the same time.

JHSO Says: It makes dollars and sense to invest in long-term homelessness solutions. These solutions, which target the causes of homelessness, not only ensure that individuals remain housed in the future, but it also improves community safety. The time to invest in housing programs is now.