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# HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

**Bulletin** \* January 2014, Volume 3, Issue 1

*Homelessness among Veterans*

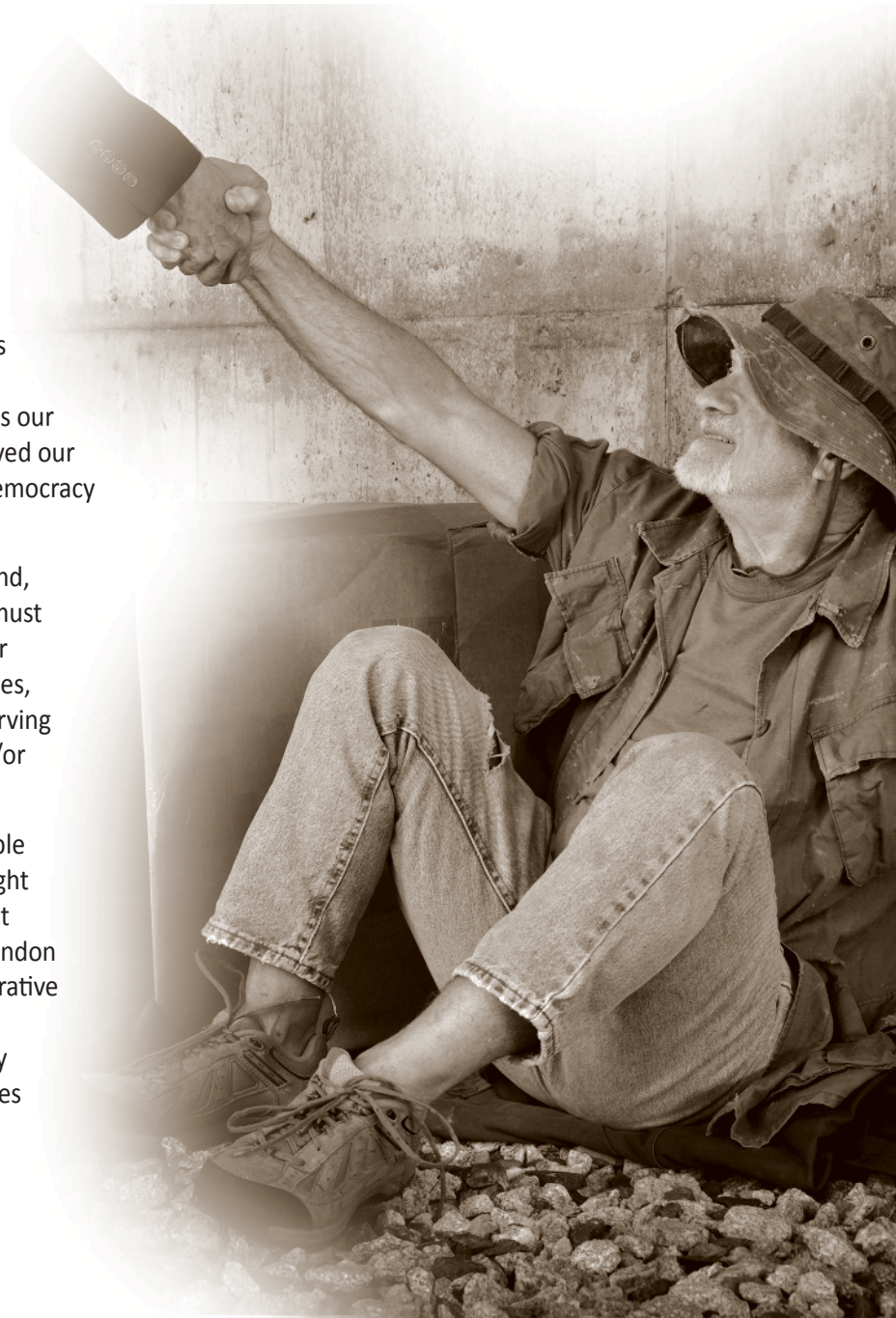
## Message from Minister of Veterans Affairs Julian Fantino and Minister of State (Social Development) Candice Bergen

Dear partners,

This special edition of the HPS Bulletin has been dedicated to the issue of homelessness among Canada's veterans. As you know, the homeless population across Canada comes from all walks of life, and sadly it includes our veterans — courageous men and women who have served our country and defended our shared values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Veterans who are homeless have a story all their own and, as we are coming to learn through recent findings, we must better understand their story to be more effective in our efforts to assist them. They have distinct needs and issues, which flow from their military service, whether from serving on various peacekeeping missions, armed conflicts and/or emergency responses.

Until now, however, very little research has been available in the Canadian context to provide insight into what might help this population. To that end, a national pilot project was launched in four Canadian cities, with the city of London playing an important coordinating role. This is a collaborative effort between Employment and Social Development Canada, Veterans Affairs Canada and several community partners, with the hope of identifying promising practices to prevent and reduce homelessness among veterans. We are happy to feature this project and share some early findings. ➔



➔ In addition, the Bulletin features a number of practical ideas that could assist you in helping homeless veterans, including a variety of federal and provincial services available to help serve this population.

We trust that these ideas will be useful in your work. As always, we encourage you to share your ideas and promising practices with us.

Finally, and as you may already know, the Government of Canada's Economic Action Plan 2013 announced \$119 million per year over five years to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). This represents a \$600 million investment in using a Housing First approach. Housing First is a proven, evidence-based model that builds upon the Mental Health

Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi project, which has shown that providing Housing First services and supports are an effective way to reduce homelessness. Over the coming months, we will work with partners at the community level to confirm the implementation details of this approach.

Sincerely,

**The Honourable  
Candice Bergen**  
*Minister of State  
(Social Development)*

**The Honourable  
Julian Fantino**  
*Minister of Veterans Affairs*

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# HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS: WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Cheryl Forchuk RN PhD,  
Heather Atyeo RN(EC), BScN  
& Jan Richardson, MBA

To date, there is little known about meaningful interventions that would address homelessness among Canadian veterans. The majority of research on this topic is from the United States, which presents a very different context compared to Canada, both in terms of the nature of military service (i.e. peacekeeping missions versus combat), as well as access to health and social services upon return from active duty and/or discharge from military service. However, research originating from the United Kingdom—where contextual experiences of homelessness among veterans have noted similarities—suggests that critical elements in reducing homelessness are:

- peer support;
- self-respect;
- autonomy; and
- access to vocational rehabilitation (Milroy, 2009).

This appears consistent with basic principles identified by Canadian veterans who have experienced homelessness, but researchers indicate that further validation and exploration of solutions and housing interventions are needed.

## Special considerations for helping veterans

Underlying processes that contribute to homelessness within the veteran population are complex and interrelated. Pre-existing health status, personal problems, situational crises and experiences such as operational stress injury may contribute to chronic physical and/or mental health difficulties. Veterans who experience such difficulties frequently encounter greater levels of stigma and barriers to access health and social services (Iversen et al., 2011). Down the road, this may lead to dysfunction in many areas, including work and interaction with others (Paré, 2011). These challenges may interfere with the successful transition to civilian life (Higate, 2001), leaving those exiting military service vulnerable to a variety of social problems, including unstable or inadequate housing.

Homeless shelters are among the points of access to services for this population. However, it is important to be aware that people may not self-identify as veterans for a variety of reasons. As a result, innovative outreach approaches may be necessary, such as London CAREs. This “feet on the street” approach provides a daily contact with clients, meeting individuals wherever they are. London CAREs provides an in-the-moment response that focuses on improved health outcomes and securing housing. By having a strong street presence and offering immediate intervention with the individual, diversion from emergency services is achieved, along with fostering a trusting relationship.

## Targeted services for veterans

Ray and Forchuk (2011) found that Canadian veterans often became homeless one decade after leaving the service. For many participants in this study, the transition from military to an unstructured civilian life was a particularly vulnerable period. Major issues that led to homelessness over time include addiction issues and mental health problems. Early identification of these issues would provide an opportunity to facilitate interventions that may prevent the downward spiral to homelessness. Veterans felt that targeted outreach from organizations such as Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) address their specific needs, facilitate improved access and offer a positive connection with services and resources. For example, Calgary has a dedicated facility that provides housing with support to veterans experiencing homelessness. The on-site support provided by the VAC local office helps link veterans to services and supports. These connections support positive leisure and recreation, peer engagement and a reconnection to friendships and focused services.



“Most of us here are the forgotten ones. Too young for the Korean war, but too old for anything else, and well we’re stuck right in the middle...we were the forgotten ones, because we weren’t in any real war.”

*Anonymous veteran*

Key principles to address homelessness among Canadian veterans include providing:

- services separate from the general shelter population;
- a transition process to housing;
- services to address alcoholism issues/addiction;
- structure during the day;
- emphasis on promoting self-respect; and
- peer support (by veterans for veterans).

In light of these findings, there was a desire to evaluate whether interventions based on the above-mentioned principles could more effectively address some of the difficulties that predispose Canadian veterans to homelessness. To do that, a horizontal pilot project involving communities, service providers and the federal government was designed and launched in four different sites across the country. The following interview section provides you with information on this national pilot project.

## OTHER FACTORS

### to Address Homelessness Among Veterans

- Establish relationships between all key stakeholders, involve them from the start and work as a team. This helps to develop clear processes between all type of services (including outreach, intake, validation of veteran status, etc.).
- Offer pragmatic support, such as assistance with forms and finances.
- Have a common vision (e.g. Housing First).
- Balance safety and security with autonomy.
- Have rapid access to mental health and addiction services.
- Identify housing stock, a pool of veterans and inter-agency agreements as part of the upfront work required for launching a program for veterans.

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# TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND SUPPORTS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS – TOWARDS A CANADIAN MODEL

Interview with Jan Richardson  
Project Manager

A national pilot study was launched in May 2012 through the Federal Horizontal Pilot Projects funding stream of the HPS. It was developed in collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and community partners. The goal is to test how the provision of transitional housing and support services for homeless or at-risk veterans could help them achieve housing stability and successful re-integration into the community.

This project is based on the recognition that homeless veterans have distinct needs compared to the general homeless population. Military life and the impact of having served your country and taken part in peacekeeping missions, armed conflicts and/or emergency responses, needs to be considered in developing an effective response to homelessness among veterans.

## Recruitment

In total, 56 veterans experiencing homelessness will be supported in achieving housing stability over the 21-month project duration.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE	
Average age	54 years old
Male	87.5%
Female	12.5%
Average years in Canadian Forces	9 years
Deployed overseas	41%
Discharged	Majority in 1970/80s
Estimated average total time spent homeless	9 years; approximately 144 nights per year



The strategy for locating and recruiting participants varied, depending on the site. For sites already established before the project, such as Victoria and Calgary, the recruitment phase was simpler; they could count on the existing network and services to select participants. For new sites, such as London and Toronto, the recruitment strategy involved preliminary discussions with veterans to determine how to select participants and active networking with emergency shelters and homelessness-related service providers to reach potential participants.

## Four sites – Four housing models

Four communities are participating in this pilot project: Victoria, Calgary, Toronto and London. Local community partners with experience in working with homeless and/or veteran populations are working closely with the local Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) office at each respective site.

## Services provided

Although the housing type and approach vary, the four sites provide the same type of services and support. The focus of services is on: promoting and regaining self-respect; offering or referring to programs for assessment and treatment of mental illness and addictions; and supporting individuals for longer-term housing stability in the community.

FOUR SITES OF THE HOUSING AND SUPPORTS FOR HOMELESS VETERANS PILOT PROJECT				
	Victoria, BC	Calgary, AB	Toronto, ON	London, ON
<b>Name</b>	Cockrell House	Alpha House	Mainstay Housing	London CARES
<b>Capacity</b>	11 people	15 people	20 people	10 people
<b>Housing Type</b>	Shared accommodation in congregate housing	Single accommodation in congregate housing	Shared accommodation in congregate housing	Scattered private-sector housing
<b>Unique Aspects</b>	100% peer-driven support provided by a team of volunteer veterans.	Housing first and harm-reduction approach; emphasis on fitting in with neighbours and being part of the community.	After two years at Mainstay, residents can apply for permanent housing in Mainstay facility or elsewhere.	Assist participants to integrate into their new houses and neighborhoods; housing first and harm-reduction approach.

Veterans experiencing homelessness have many personal issues to overcome, particularly during the first three months of their housing experience. It is important that participants benefit from early intervention strategies by case managers, experts and other veterans to help them transition to housing within the community. Local VAC offices play an essential role in facilitating access to the VAC benefits and services, as well as medical, mental health, occupational therapy assessments and addiction rehabilitation services. On-call or on-site crisis intervention is provided 24/7 to all participants.

The development of individualized plans and goals to successfully reintegrate the individual into their community, family and workplace is an important part of the process. It usually includes a variety of life-skill development activities, such as money management, cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and laundry, and ensuring leisure and recreation. Success of these interventions with veterans depends more on **how** the service is provided, rather than the service itself.

Support does not end when the individual seems more stable in his or her housing. For many individuals, ongoing support is needed over an extended period of time as they move towards autonomy and self-sufficiency.

### Specific approach to help homeless veterans

When providing support to veterans, it is essential to be aware of, and tailor services based on, military values. Many service providers and researchers suggest that services for veterans in need should be provided separately from the services for the general homeless population.

Veterans are generally more comfortable in a structured environment; some of them need help to learn how to structure their own time. The value of **structure and order** becomes paramount when developing daily plans for homeless veterans, in comparison to other homeless populations.

As veterans have lived for many years in a comradesly environment where unity relies on special bonding, the involvement and support of peers is a key element. Accordingly, most sites have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, **peer support** for participants. The support provided at the Cockrell House, for example, is entirely peer driven. The VAC National Centre for Operational Stress Injuries and Operational Stress Injury Clinics also offer peer support to participants.

"I think because we have [staff] here, they at least know where we came from and they can relate to us. I use their services often. Come down and talk to them...they don't judge. And they're honest and they treat us with respect."

*Anonymous veteran*

### Challenges

In shared accommodations, there is a greater risk of compatibility and privacy issues. It can be hard to find balance between individual rights and group issues, since not everyone is at the same stage in terms of recovery. For example, one individual's drinking threatens another's sobriety. On the other hand, people living alone in a private-sector apartment tend to feel isolated. Leisure and recreational activities were introduced to reduce this sense of isolation.

"I'm not accustomed to living alone. I've spent most of my life in an environment with men around me, right? So I didn't realize...it's going to take me a while to adjust to it."

*Anonymous veteran*

From an operational perspective, it can be a challenge for centres relying on volunteers to provide 24/7 support. Training is also needed to help volunteers in their role. The name given to a program or service also needs to consider the experiences that veterans have faced. While there may be stigma associated with "Mental Health Clinics," veterans are more likely to seek help from "Operational Stress Injury Clinics" providing the same services.

### Promising practices

Although the project will not be completed until March 2014, it is already showing positive results. A project of this scope requires national coordination and collaboration to achieve expected results, to evaluate what works best and to identify what could be replicated throughout the country. Ms. Richardson shared some good practices based on early findings.

**Collaboration and leadership:** To effectively establish and lead such a project, collaboration between all involved organizations, service providers, agencies, stakeholders and volunteers is essential. This requires strong leadership and coordination: "There will never be enough money to do all of the great things we want to do. By working in a collaborative model, and by piggybacking on the strengths of other systems, anything is achievable." It is also crucial to build partnerships and to rely on the expertise of different team members.

**Ongoing communication:** It is important to keep the communication active and alert to immediate problem solving, so that everyone can share challenges and work together to find solutions. Knowledge sharing assists in improving effectiveness, identifying and reducing some of the practical barriers in supporting veterans in their personal plans and avoiding duplication of work.

**Housing First:** Ms. Richardson highlighted that anchoring this project in the principles of a Housing First philosophy and interventions seems to show promise. "With housing secured, the nonjudgmental support becomes hopeful and the structure through objective-based interventions builds change. Change may be reconnecting with their military peers or family and lead towards positive recovery and treatment."



South-Mid Vancouver Island Zone Veterans Housing Society Cockrell House, Victoria

"I need my sanctuary, I need that place where I know I'm safe I can go to, and I can just be safe."

*Anonymous veteran*

**Patience:** This approach also takes into consideration that people need time to transition and adjust to this new lifestyle. "Patience to work with individuals at their pace of change is needed to successfully reframe and rebuild their life."

### Tools for communities

At the end of the project, a manual will be developed that identifies local promising practices and generic program guidelines. The manual will focus on housing with support and offer best practices that can be provided in any community program and/or service for veterans experiencing homelessness. This manual should be available in 2014.

We would like to thank Ms. Jan Richardson, who was interviewed for this piece. For more information on this project, Ms. Richardson can be reached at [jrichardson@london.ca](mailto:jrichardson@london.ca).

"Housing itself is not the solution. It is the housing combined with the right support, at the right time, in the right place, that is needed to improve the overall health outcomes of those being served and to create success in achieving housing stability."

*Jan Richardson*

# VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA'S ROLE AND SERVICES PROVIDED TO VETERANS IN NEED

## What Veterans Affairs Canada does

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) provides services and benefits to traditional war service veterans from the Second World War and Korean War, modern-day veterans and eligible family members. VAC helps veterans make the transition into civilian life and keep the memory of their achievements and sacrifices alive for all Canadians.

## The New Veterans Charter

VAC maintains a proud tradition of continually evolving to meet veterans' changing needs. Introduced in 2006, the New Veterans Charter (NVC) offers a full package of benefits and services that can be tailored to meet the individual needs of each veteran and his or her family. It offers the financial help veterans need, while providing full physical and psychological rehabilitation services, vocational assistance, health-care benefits and one-on-one case management—all aimed at helping veterans make a successful transition to civilian life.

## Case management services at VAC

Case management is a service offered by VAC to veterans with complex needs and their families. Case managers engage and build relationships with veterans and their families; identify their needs and goals; develop a case plan with them to reach those goals; monitor and evaluate progress; and disengage once those goals have been met.

Case management services are not required for all veterans. These services are provided to those who are at risk and/or experiencing:

- significant health issues affecting their ability to cope or problem-solve independently;
- multiple needs for which they require assistance in accessing and coordinating the appropriate services and benefits; and/or
- difficulty re-establishing into civilian life due to medical, psychosocial and/or vocational needs.

## VAC outreach initiatives

VAC area offices regularly carry out a number of activities to raise awareness of VAC benefits, services and programs. This includes outreach to veterans, veterans' families and community organizations.

VAC staff identifies and helps homeless veterans and those at risk of homelessness to access VAC benefits and services for which they may be eligible, as well as community supports such as housing and other types of assistance. In addition, VAC can help individuals in crisis access emergency funds available from sources such as the Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund, the Canadian Forces Personnel Assistance Fund, VAC/Department of National Defence contingency funds and other trust funds administered by VAC, the Department of National Defence and service organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion.

Specific outreach initiatives in the domain of homelessness have been established in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, in partnership with the Operational Stress Injury Social Support program and community organizations.

## The importance of partnerships at VAC

To date, VAC has made contact with over 190 organizations that support homeless people across Canada. In more than 50 cities, VAC provides homeless and at-risk veterans with information about benefits, services and programs that may help them. VAC partners, including local veteran and community organizations, are important in helping identify homeless veterans who may be eligible for VAC benefits, services and programs.

If you know a homeless veteran, or a veteran at risk of becoming homeless, please provide your support by connecting him or her with the local VAC area office. Or call the VAC National Contact Centre Network toll-free at 1-866-522-2122 (English) and 1-866-522-2022 (French).

For more information on benefits, services and programs offered by VAC, visit [www.veterans.gc.ca](http://www.veterans.gc.ca).



This section showcases an innovative practice supported by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to help veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. An overview of recent changes in Ontario related to homelessness programming is also provided.

### Improved access to social housing for veterans in Newfoundland and Labrador

Veterans may face challenges related to accessing and maintaining affordable and stable housing, which can in turn place them at increased risk of becoming homeless. Recognizing that, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) does not include pension income from Veterans Affairs Canada in the household annual income used to calculate rent for a veteran living in rental housing supported by NLHC.

The primary eligibility criteria to access social housing supported by NLHC is a household annual income below \$32,500 (a higher income threshold is permitted in Labrador West and Northern Coastal Labrador). The exemption of Veterans Affairs pension income in the calculation of rent has been implemented and supported by NLHC since July 2009.

Veterans who live in social housing supported by NLHC are eligible to receive supports closely tied to the area in which they reside, such as a community centre and a neighbourhood and/or tenant association. As tenants, veterans may access scholarship and educational incentive programs that support staying in school, as well as a variety of skill development initiatives.

For more information, please contact Maureen Murphy, Manager, Community Development, at [mjmurphy@nlhc.nl.ca](mailto:mjmurphy@nlhc.nl.ca).

### Simplifying the system: Ontario's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative

Ontario's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), launched in January 2013, combines funding from five former housing and homelessness programs into a single funding envelope delivered by 47 municipal service managers.

Clients, including veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, will benefit from services and supports that better reflect the unique housing needs of their local community.



Under the CHPI, the types of programs delivered are determined locally in accordance with two provincial program outcomes. Those outcomes are that people:

- experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing; and
- at risk of homelessness remain housed.

Service managers now have access to a wider range of service options across four categories:

1. Emergency Shelter Solutions – shelter and supports to people who are homeless or in a crisis situation.
2. Housing with Related Supports – long-term/transitional housing and related supports.
3. Other Services and Supports – services provided directly to households experiencing or at risk of homelessness (e.g. street and housing outreach, case management, securing and retaining housing/shelter, food banks).
4. Homelessness Prevention – eviction prevention and re-housing.

Over time, the CHPI will contribute to a better coordinated and integrated service delivery system that reflects a Housing First approach to prevent, reduce and address homelessness.

For more information, contact Brent Whitty, Manager, Housing Programs Branch, at [Brent.Whitty@ontario.ca](mailto:Brent.Whitty@ontario.ca).

## OTHER NEWS AND EVENTS

### The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System 3.8 is launched!

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is proud to announce that HIFIS 3.8 is already in use at over 450 service providers across the country. HIFIS 3.8 is a user-friendly software built for sheltering agencies and homelessness service providers. The software is a useful tool to manage day-to-day operations, improve the ability to collect data on the population using shelters and enhance longer-term community planning and capacity building to address local homelessness. This recent version includes many new features, such as case management, housing placement, and foodbank operations. HIFIS 3.8 is also supported by a Web-based, self-directed e-learning program to meet the training needs of users.

Both HIFIS 3.8 and the e-learning program are provided free of charge at [http://hifis.hrsdc.gc.ca/logiciel-software/38\\_available.shtml](http://hifis.hrsdc.gc.ca/logiciel-software/38_available.shtml).

### Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Newsletter

In January 2013, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) launched its first newsletter. The newsletters share the latest news and information from the CAEH and the issue of homelessness in Canada. To view the publications or to subscribe, visit [www.caeh.ca/news/newsletter](http://www.caeh.ca/news/newsletter).

### Report highlights potential role of private sector in addressing youth unemployment

The organization Raising the Roof released *It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness*. The report explores how businesses and community agencies currently work together to provide training and employment for at-risk youth. The goal is to help bring about a change in attitude, policy and practice within the private sector, paving the way for new employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth across Canada. The report points to the need for cooperation and coordination between the private sector, community agencies and government.

You can consult the report and its recommendations at <http://raisingtheroof.org/Our-Programs/Employer-Agency-Toolkit/Report.aspx>.

Along with the report, Raising the Roof has also launched an **online toolkit** for prospective employers and community agencies — the first practical national resource of its kind in Canada. Of note, the toolkit includes a **national youth employment services map**.

### National Housing Research Committee Fall 2013 Homelessness Working Group

Most housing organizations in Canada deal with the social issue of homelessness. The National Housing Research Committee (NHRC) established this working group on homelessness in 1994 to help provide a comprehensive response to the homeless population's needs, and to coordinate the services and the service providers acting in homeless persons' interests. For more details about the working group, visit: <http://nhrc-cnrl.ca/en/meeting/fall-2012-homelessness-working-group>

The NHRC's Fall 2013 Homelessness Working Group meeting was held on November 4, 2013. Dr. Michael Young, Ph.D., Royal Roads University, and Dr. Wilfreda E. Thurston, Ph.D., University of Calgary, provided excellent presentations on Rural and Remote Homelessness.

- Dr. Young presented the findings from a recent project that focused on the current addictions and mental health support needs of homeless men and women in Inuvik and surrounding communities. It also discussed supportive housing initiatives that address these needs and models for northern culturally appropriate supportive housing.
- Dr. Thurston presented a recent research project that critically examined Aboriginal people's experiences of migration from rural to urban settings and how systems create and respond to homelessness. Specifically, the presentation looked at the community's capacity to adequately respond in a timely way to an emergent need; coordination and resourcing of systems of care; and the culturally safe nature of current approaches to service provision.

To see the videos of the meeting or read the presentations: <http://nhrc-cnrl.ca/en/meeting/current/homelessness-wg>

## **46<sup>th</sup> National Congress on Housing & Homelessness**

The Canadian Housing & Renewal Association (CHRA) will hold its 46<sup>th</sup> National Congress on Housing & Homelessness in Edmonton in April and May of 2014. This unique national gathering offers an excellent opportunity for dialogue, networking and inspiration. The Congress brings together a diverse group of delegates from those who collectively house and shelter hundreds of thousands of Canadians and provide housing support to many more.

Mark your calendars for April 29 to May 2, 2014. For further information and online registration (starting in January), visit the **CHRA website**.