



HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

Summary

Improving Housing Outcomes for Aboriginal People in Western Canada **National, Regional, Community and Individual Perspectives on Changing the Future of Homelessness**

Thurston, W., Oelke, N., Turner, D., and Bird, C., University of Calgary, 2011

This study identifies the most effective policies, procedures and practices for working with Aboriginal people who experience homelessness.

Key term

Cultural Safety: Understanding of the history of Aboriginal people in Canada including that most Aboriginal people want to reconcile with the rest of Canada after decades of discrimination and abuse.

What are the issues?

There is a need for:

- more Aboriginal-specific services in homelessness organizations;
- a better understanding and use of cultural safety, particularly when providing services to Aboriginal people;
- organizational policies that include cultural safety;
- a better understanding of the role of cultural identity; and
- more focus on Aboriginal needs within research on homelessness.

Who was involved in the study?

Organizations that provided services to address homelessness among Aboriginal people in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria.

How was the study done?

Phase 1: Database inventory

Included 194 organizations that provided housing services to Aboriginal people and contained.

Phase 2: Policies, procedures and practices

Forty-two organizations were interviewed to determine service trends and practices.

Phase 3: Case studies

Involved six organizations considered to be effective in serving homeless Aboriginal people; two representatives from each of these organizations were interviewed.

Phase 4: Organizational capacity

Researchers explored the capacity for organizations to collaborate on an initiative to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Findings

- There is limited research on Aboriginal-specific services or acknowledgement of the unique context and needs of Aboriginal people.
- The importance of Aboriginal leadership and coordination to address the needs of homeless Aboriginal people needs to be recognized.
- Aboriginal organizations have unique resources for approaching Aboriginal homelessness:
 - Cultural reconnection is an important component of well-being and success for homeless Aboriginal people.
 - Trust building and peer mentoring are considered to be effective in service provision.
- Cultural safety in services may help Aboriginal people maintain their cultural continuity.
- The community of homelessness service providers appears to be isolated within local structures and specializations, limiting partnership development.
- Cross-cultural collaboration among service providers is hindered by multiple barriers, including misunderstanding, racism and government jurisdiction.

Effective practices for providing Aboriginal homelessness services

- **Cultural safety** in policies, procedures and practices is foundational for all organizations and staff to provide respectful and appropriate services for Aboriginal people.
- **Partnerships and relationship building** are critical in fostering a collaborative process to address the needs of homeless Aboriginal people and create cultural safety.
- **Aboriginal governance and coordination** of homelessness services requires the support of the broader Aboriginal community as well as the homeless-serving community.
- **Aboriginal specific services** can be provided by establishing a funding process.

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- **Accountability and credibility** can be established through involvement in evaluation and research, partnerships and flexibility to respond to community needs.
 - **Aboriginal representation among staff** is important for providing services to the homeless population.
 - **Cultural reconnection** is the cornerstone of addressing the needs of homeless Aboriginal people.

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