



# 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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