GETTING READY

INTRODUCTION

To support the enhanced capacity to respond to youth homelessness in communities across Canada, A Way Home has developed this toolkit to help communities create plans to prevent, reduce and end homelessness among young people.

Considerable efforts are underway to effectively address youth homelessness in Canada. These efforts have culminated in the creation of A Way Home – a national coalition focused on mobilizing communities and all levels of government to take action on youth homelessness, locally and at systems level. A Way Home is committed to supporting communities to implement evidence-based solutions, including the development of plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. Such plans act as a stimulus for local and systemic change as part of a collective action to combat youth homelessness.

Ending youth homelessness involves a number of critical elements and actions. These include the implementation of innovative programs and housing solutions tailored for the specific needs of young people and structural changes within the operations of homeless-serving systems. The transformation of public systems, including child welfare, education, mental health, income supports and criminal justice and their enhanced integration, which can facilitate broad systems of care, is essential.

Dynamics unique to each community must be accounted for in local efforts and plans to end youth homelessness. For instance, the overrepresentation of particular demographics in the local homeless population, such as Indigenous youth, makes a difference in the design of interventions. Further, addressing the issue in rural or urban settings considerably impacts system planning approaches and resources needed.

A Way Home is committed to supporting communities to advance evidence-based and strategic solutions, including the development of plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.

1

THIS TOOLKIT:

» Outlines the key elements of a systems approach to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness using best and promising practices;

» Provides guidance to local communities on a step-by-step approach to develop plans that advance solutions to end youth homelessness;

» Highlights Canadian examples of innovation and locally developed resources to enhance knowledge exchange to advance the national movement to end youth homelessness;

» Is not intended to reinvent the wheel; where resources are readily available it points the reader to these as appropriate and draws on existing research and materials throughout.

The toolkit is a resource for organizations and/or individuals considering or leading community efforts to develop strategic responses to youth homelessness. Most likely, you are working in or with non-profit, government, lived experience and private sector stakeholders to explore your next steps. This toolkit will help you map out what needs to be done to get you started, cross the finish line and beyond.

THE TOOLKIT IS ORGANIZED INTO FOUR MAIN SECTIONS:

1 **GETTING READY**

» Background on this toolkit
» Introduction to youth homelessness and youth plans
» Essential elements of youth plans

2 **GETTING STARTED**

» Collective Impact and ending youth homelessness
» Determining community readiness
» Developing your backbone infrastructure and workplan

3 **GETTING GOING**

» Research, needs assessment, and data analysis
» Consultation approach
» Working with key stakeholders, including youth, government, etc

4 **GETTING IT DONE**

» Writing the plan
» Determining costs and performance measures
» Implementation considerations

TOOLKIT DEVELOPMENT

The toolkit development process involved research and key stakeholder consultation to collect and review existing promising practices from a variety of communities across Canada at various stages of youth plan development and implementation. The research also draws on U.S., U.K. and Australian best practices literature to complement the Canadian findings.

Though the primary focus of this toolkit is on local community plans it has applicability to provincial/territorial plans as well.

Communities of different sizes are highlighted to ensure the toolkit's relevance across Canada; provincial approaches are also included. Key stakeholders with experience developing and/or implementing youth plans provided input into the final toolkit, along with materials that can be used as resources. Note that one of these plans (Alberta) is provincial in scope; though the primary focus of this toolkit is on local community plans it has applicability to provincial/territorial plans as well.

Table 1: Youth Plans Across Canada and the U.S.

COMMUNITY	STAGE
Kingston, ON	Implementation
Kamloops, BC	Implementation
Seattle, U.S.	Implementation
Edmonton, AB	Implementation
Calgary, AB	Development after initial implementation
Cochrane, AB	Implementation
Wellington County, ON	Development
Saint John, NB	Development
St. John's, NL	Pre-development
Brandon, MB	Development
Yellowknife, NWT	Development
Winnipeg, MB	Development
Alberta	Implementation
Ottawa, ON	Pre-development

AN INDIGENOUS MODULE

We must acknowledge the experience of Indigenous people in Canada if we are to truly end youth homelessness, particularly in light of their consistent overrepresentation in vulnerable populations. Indigenous homelessness is notably different; the structural and systemic determinants associated with colonialism, the Indian Act, treaty making, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop have resulted in considerable discriminatory impacts that are in fact intergenerational (Plan to End Aboriginal Homelessness in Calgary, p. 1).

It is further important to highlight that being homeless can be experienced from diverse perspectives: cultural, spiritual or emotional. It is more than a loss of housing. The impact of colonization, residential schooling, intergenerational trauma, ongoing discrimination and racism in Canadian society has contributed to the ongoing systematic marginalization of Indigenous people, including Indigenous youth (Calgary's Updated Plan to End Homelessness, p. 23).

Recognizing these critical issues, A Way Home is working to complement this toolkit with a more robust Indigenous module, which includes resources specific to Indigenous youth homelessness.

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ABOUT A WAY HOME

A Way Home is a national coalition dedicated to preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness in Canada. Through a 'collective impact' framework we inspire and enable communities and all levels of government to organize, plan and implement strategies to address youth homelessness in a coordinated, measurable and impactful way. By strengthening families and building the assets and resilience of youth, we can help young people avoid homelessness and make a healthy transition to adulthood.

As a coalition, we draw on the strengths of leading national organizations such as Raising the Roof, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Egale Canada and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness. Each activity within the constellation allows for cross-sectoral partnership and the opportunity to get the 'unusual suspects' at the table. The work of A Way Home is achieved by building on existing strengths, community engagement and innovation. The coalition is dedicated to building a strong and emerging commitment, across the country, to end youth homelessness and encourage alignment of the strategies and resources of leading players seeking to address homelessness in Canada.

A Way Home offers communities across Canada a range of tools and strategies to support the national movement to end youth homelessness, including:

» Collective impact, 'theory of change,' implementation support and opportunities for implementation grants delivered in partnership with the McConnell Foundation's Youth Collective Impact Initiatives;

» Assistance to local communities and ongoing support for coordinators and backbone functions;

» Program model resources – toolkits and technical support for adapting and implementing effective program models;

» Increased connection to government systems to support community-driven responses.

Coalition members collaborate to provide a range of resources and technical supports to assist communities to plan and implement strategies to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness and to adapt effective program models and interventions to support these plans. Technical supports include tools, toolkits, webinars, example plans and implementation strategies.

For more information on A Way Home's work and supports, see www.awayhome.ca.

A PRIMER ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

This toolkit is not intended to replace resources that already exist; rather, it is designed to provide an overview of the essentials involved in developing a plan to end youth homelessness. As a starting point, we will outline some basics on youth homelessness, along with approaches to address it. This will set the context for further guidance on developing a youth plan.

WHAT IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

Considerable work has been done on defining youth homelessness consistently at a national level. The national definition of youth homelessness advanced by the COH is as follows:

"Youth homelessness" refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people who are homelessness lack the personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, nor wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful.

Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.

We strongly urge communities to consider adopting the national definition of youth homelessness to ensure consistency across Canada.

HOW MANY YOUTH EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS?

Though no single definitive source on youth homelessness prevalence exists at this time, the State of Homelessness in Canada 2013 report estimates that at least 35,000 young people experience homelessness annually – or 6,000 youth on any given night.

More reliable information on the prevalence and characteristics of homeless youth will emerge thanks to major research efforts underway, including:

» National Point-in-Time Homeless Counts – to be undertaken in 2016 across Canadian communities using standard methods

» National Youth Homelessness Survey – results from across Canadian communities expected for release in 2016 outlining detailed analysis of characteristics and needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

Youth experience homelessness in distinct ways; they are often less visible on the street and more likely to 'couch surf.'

WHY IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DISTINCT?

Research has consistently shown that the causes and impacts of youth homelessness are distinct from adult homelessness, thus the plans and interventions we use must be correspondingly distinct and tailored to youth. Youth experience homelessness in distinct ways; they are often less visible on the street and more likely to 'couch surf.' This is particularly common in smaller, rural and remote communities, where homelessness is generally less visible. Youth are often reported to be homeless as a result of abuse in the home, which leads to notable movement and transience as they seek a safe place to live outside of their familial home.

WHY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS DIFFERENT

Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary (2011):

» Youth are in the process of developing physically, socially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually

» Youth homelessness stems in large part from problems or conflict in families and homes

» Youth under the age of majority have distinct legal entitlements and restrictions

» Many youth entering homelessness are leaving lives that were previously governed by adult caregivers

» Youth are served by a distinct infrastructure involving separate systems of justice, education, health and child protection/welfare

» Many youth enter homelessness with little or no work experience,

» Many youth are forced to abandon their education because of homelessness

» Homeless youth – and many youth in general – experience high levels of criminal victimization

Alberta Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (2015):

» Youth are in the process of transitioning toward adulthood and may not have acquired personal, social and life skills that make independent living possible

» Youth tend to seek, access and respond to services and supports differently than other homeless individuals

» They often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities

» Youth have particularly challenging issues and require targeted responses to be rehoused

» For youth under the age of 18, the situation is complicated by the obligation of families and/or the government to care for them and provide for their basic needs

» For youth involved with the Child Intervention System, these issues are further magnified if healthy transitions are not prioritized

Youth are extremely vulnerable because they are at an early life stage, still developing cognitively, physically, emotionally and socially. For many young people who experience homelessness, these challenges are often complicated by the fact that they are simultaneously dealing with life-altering events such as recent trauma and/or violence. Youth homelessness exists within a broad and complex spectrum of circumstances. Youth experiencing homelessness are precariously housed – couch surfing, staying in youth and adult shelters or sleeping rough and are often discharged into homelessness from public institutions and systems, including child intervention and foster care.

LGBTQ2S youth experience the additional layer of challenges faced by those with sexual orientations and gender identities that are different from the mainstream.

In some communities, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant and visible minority youth are overrepresented. With respect to Indigenous youth, the interrelated issues of poverty, domestic, violence, trauma and abuse and ongoing discrimination and lack of cultural connections further exacerbate the experience of housing stress.

Youth who identify as LGBTQ2S make up 25–40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5–10% of the general population. LGBTQ2S youth experience the additional layer of challenges faced by those with sexual orientations and gender identities that are different from the mainstream. LGBTQ2S youth are over-represented among the population experiencing homelessness as a result of homophobia and transphobia in the home and across the service and housing systems. This in turn impacts the development of responses and interventions.

As the Homeless Hub notes, youth often lack the experience and skills necessary to live independently, particularly those under the age of majority. Youth's physical, mental, social and emotional development impacts their needs and the type of interventions best suited to house and support them further. One cannot assume the needs of a 13 year old are equivalent to those of a 24 year old, for instance.

The causes of youth homelessness are distinct and primarily underlined by family conflict; many are fleeing abuse or leaving the care of child welfare services. Homelessness for youth goes beyond a loss of stable housing: it is the loss of a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence. This creates an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community. A high percentage of homeless youth were also previously in the care of child protection services, making system responses a priority in any efforts to end youth homelessness.

Homelessness for youth goes beyond a loss of stable housing: it is the loss of a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence.

PLANS TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

In [Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada](#), Dr. Stephen Gaetz argues that ending youth homelessness is not simply assuming that youth will never need emergency services again, but rather that we develop strategies to resolve a broad social problem that traps young people in an ongoing state of homelessness. When young people come to depend on emergency services without access to permanent and age-appropriate housing and necessary supports, this leads to declining health and well-being and most certainly to an uncertain future. An alternative is to look at approaches that emphasize prevention and/or interventions that lead to appropriate housing options with supports (2014: 2).

When young people come to depend on emergency services without access to permanent and age-appropriate housing and necessary supports, this leads to declining health and well-being and most certainly to an uncertain future.

It's important to highlight that the main shift advanced by a plan to end youth homelessness refocuses our efforts on prevention as opposed to emergency supports. This represents a new way of thinking about youth homelessness, which may challenge the prevailing norm in a community. Rather than 'managing' homelessness through emergency services, we are proposing a concerted focus on prevention.

A strong prevention approach requires a coordinated and strategic systems approach and as a consequence, must engage, include and mandate action from mainstream systems and departments of government as well as the homeless-serving sector. No solution to end homelessness can or should depend wholly on the efforts of those in the homeless-serving sector.

Preventing youth homelessness, then, means doing things differently.

WHAT IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION?

1

PRIMARY PREVENTION:

Working upstream to prevent new instances of homelessness through identifying and reducing risks that may increase the likelihood that individuals and families become homeless. Primary prevention strategies can be aimed at individuals, families or whole communities. Primary homeless prevention includes the following:

a) **Broad, population-based approaches** intended to address risk factors well before they have an impact. This includes poverty reduction, ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing, addressing interpersonal violence and anti-discrimination work.

b) **Systems-based prevention** to stem the flow of individuals and families leaving institutional care and falling into homelessness. This includes a policy framework and discharge planning and supports targeting individuals leaving institutional settings such as child protection, corrections and mental health inpatient facilities.

c) **Targeted interventions** aimed at sub-populations that are at higher risk of homelessness. These strategies are intended to address risk factors such as income precariousness, family conflict and violence, mental health or addictions, criminal involvement or dropping out of school, for instance. Interventions are targeted to those broadly at risk (but not necessarily imminently at risk) and can include school-based early intervention programs, Family First supports, conflict mediation, etc. that are usually delivered in the community.

2

SECONDARY PREVENTION:

Early intervention strategies when young people have recently become homeless or are at imminent risk. These early intervention strategies seek to keep young people 'in place' in their communities where they have natural supports, divert them from emergency shelters and mainstream homelessness services, help them stay in school and work with their families so that young people can safely remain/return home or move into their own accommodation in a safe and planned way.

Secondary prevention strategies typically require systems integration and coordination (coordinated intake, shared information management systems) as well as specific case management interventions designed to avoid the experience of homelessness and/or reduce the time spent homeless. In other words, the goal here is not to have young people avoid homelessness on their own ('bootstrap' their way up), but rather shore up their natural supports in the community to help them avoid entering and becoming entrenched in the homelessness 'system.' Emergency services and supports (shelters, day programs, soup kitchens, etc.) are important community resources and can be considered preventive (early intervention) if they proactively assist young people through case management to return home, address family conflict or move out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

3

TERTIARY PREVENTION:

Ensuring that young people who have experienced homelessness exit that situation as quickly as possible and do not return to homelessness. Housing First for Youth strategies are designed to provide stability, reduce the risk of future homelessness and help ensure a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence.

For more on prevention see http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention.

ELEMENTS OF YOUTH PLANS

A quick internet search will reveal a number of plans to end youth homelessness, several of which are from Canadian communities. Though research on successful youth plans does not exist at this time, we do know the characteristics of solid community planning apply to youth plans as well. Look to the A Way Home website to see the various youth plans currently published.

AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH PLAN:

» Includes a statement of **guiding principles** and **core values**,

» **Engages the necessary players** from the community, all levels of government and the non-profit and private sectors to work toward real reductions in homelessness

» Depends on **collaboration** among a wide range of stakeholders including funders, governments, service providers (mainstream as well as homeless-serving organizations) and those affected by homelessness

» Articulates **necessary actions** at the service, local and government levels

» **Involves young people** in planning, delivery and evaluation

» Has **clearly articulated** goals and objectives, timelines, responsibilities, benchmarks and measurable targets

» Outlines the **resources** needed for implementation, including projected budgets and cost-savings

» Provides direction on **implementation actions and governance options** to move actions forward

» Leads to **real changes** in young people's lives in implementation

» Is a '**living plan**' renewed on an ongoing basis to ensure relevance and progress is maintained

WHAT A PLAN CAN & CANNOT DO

It bears emphasizing that a plan will NOT in and of itself end youth homelessness. A plan should serve three purposes:

1 Validate good work that is occurring in response to this issue

2 Set clear direction for the necessary system changes and shifts required

3 Grant permission to move forward, innovate and create

Specifically, a plan can kick-start a systems response in your community that can transform how services are delivered and coordinated. A plan can be a vehicle for system reform as well, particularly given the role of child intervention, justice and health in the lives of youth.

It is also important to have the foresight to consider implementation from the start. Aligning the youth plan to other initiatives underway, such as general homelessness strategies, child intervention system reform efforts, poverty reduction strategies, etc. can ensure these opportunities are both leveraged and reinforced by the youth plan.

The plan can be a vehicle for action; as such, the planning process can be conceived as an intentional relationship and trust-building effort to support eventual implementation. Those leading the development of plans should keep an eye on how the process can align people and resources for implementation. This toolkit provides guidance on ensuring you are setting the right conditions to support plan implementation. Without a vigilant eye on implementation from the start, the best-laid plans remain just plans.

Effectively, without a vigilant eye on implementation from the start, the best laid plans remain just plans.

Those leading planning should manage expectations of stakeholders around what a plan can actually achieve. This means being very clear from the start on what the scope of the youth plan is and, importantly, is not. Ensuring that stakeholders are clear on the objectives of the planning process and can refer back to these throughout will be essential to staying on track.

Despite our best efforts however, barriers will emerge throughout this process. You are effectively competing for limited resources – and if youth win, it can be seen that other groups may have lost. How do we communicate and legitimize the focus on youth in a scarcity context?

In the process of developing a plan, you may:

» Fail to include an important stakeholder in your consultations

» Misinterpret the research

» Not have data necessary for critical analyses

» Have inadequate resources to develop and/or implement the plan

» Fail to effectively engage a key public system partner

» Lack a visible champion in community

» Secure minimal support from the broader community

» Experience changes in political leadership

» All of the above

These experiences are not unusual; in fact, you should expect them. Building a supportive planning team and coordinating infrastructure, maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders and having a strong foundation for the work based on a common vision and shared values will go a long way toward weathering such challenges.

DO YOU NEED TO HAVE A SPECIFIC PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

As noted, the needs of youth are distinct and there is evidence of improved impact when an explicit focus on age-appropriate housing and supports is in place. However, that does not always require a youth plan per se. Your community may already have measures underway to address youth homelessness as part of broader homelessness strategies. Arguably, those strategies are working well – or not.

A youth plan is very useful in particular circumstances such as:

» There is interest in youth homelessness, but not necessarily knowledge of the specific actions needed to address it

» Willingness to shift the homeless response from managing the crisis (through emergency services) to a prevention focus that includes moving young people out of homelessness rapidly

» The community has the infrastructure and resources to take on the coordination and development of a youth-specific strategy

» The community has a means of advancing implementation of a youth plan and monitoring progress

» There is already significant movement on youth homelessness, which could benefit from strategic coordination to maximize impact

» Political changes may be underway which could create a structural opening to advance system reform and funding asks to support an end to youth homelessness

» An infusion of resources (government, private, etc.) has been introduced that could be molded to advance ending youth homelessness goals if community leadership coalesced

It is important to be mindful of your community's readiness and local context when selecting your course of action. A plan may even derail community efforts if undertaken without proper consultation and buy-in from critical stakeholders, if development is lacking a solid evidence base and/or there is no foresight to implementation.

In certain cases, you may find that the youth planning effort may be challenged by other initiatives underway – particularly those focused on ending chronic and episodic homelessness. These initiatives should not work at odds with one another. Communities and governments can have more than one priority in their efforts to address homelessness.

THE YOUTH PLAN AS COLLECTIVE IMPACT

'Collective impact' is a useful framework to help you consider the key facets of building a movement to end youth homelessness. However, building a youth plan is only one step in a collective impact initiative; collective impact is a much more complex, long-term cross-sectoral mobilization effort to bring about social change. The goal of collective impact in this instance is to end youth homelessness. A youth plan can certainly contribute to such an effort, but it will not in and of itself bring about the desired social change.

Collective impact provides the key conditions for success you want to consider in the plan development process. In many ways, the ultimate success of a planning effort is not the plan itself, but the collective stakeholders' capacity to deliver on its articulated common goals , towards ending youth homelessness. This is an important consideration for communities embarking on this journey: your guidepost is NOT the plan itself, it is your ability to leverage the plan development – educating others and consolidating multiple policy levers and implementation processes to make a real impact on youth homelessness. If a plan is a hindrance to this ultimate objective, then it may not be the right means of engendering the desired change in your community.

Developing a 'theory of change' is useful at this stage and can be revisited throughout your planning process, to clarify the impact sought and how it will be achieved. The McConnell Foundation's Innoweave provides an excellent exercise to develop your theory of change. Work through the short exercise with the planning group and consider introducing it as part of your consultation process.

In many ways, the ultimate success of a planning effort is not the plan itself, but the collective stakeholders' capacity to deliver on its articulated common goals and ultimately end youth homelessness.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Target time for completion: 45 Minutes

MISSION	INTENDED IMPACT	
1. What problem are you trying to solve, or change do you aspire to see? *Identify the change you hope to see as a result of your activities.*	2. Who are your target beneficiaries? *Be specific (e.g. demographics, key stakeholders, geography.)*	3. What are the benefits you wish to create for them? *Identify the impact you would like to have on your beneficiaries.*
Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions

Table 2: Innoweave Theory of Change Exercise

www.innoweave.ca

THEORY OF CHANGE				
4. What changes are needed, or barriers that must be overcome, to achieve your impact? *Changes should be empirically plausible and evidence-based.*	5. Activity A *What you will do to make change.*	6. Outcome A *Desired outcome as a result of activity, to which you hold yourself accountable.*	7. Evidence A Evidence of the desired outcome.	Statement *Concise statement of your Theory of Change.*
	5. Activity B	6. Outcome B	7. Evidence B	
	5. Activity C	6, Outcome C	7. Evidence C	
Assumptions	Resources required for these activites			Context *External factors that impact your Theory of Change.*

What is Collective Impact?

As described by FSG, collective impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a complex social problem.

In order to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large scale, organizations – including those in government, civil society and the business sector – need to coordinate their efforts and work together around a clearly defined goal.

Collective impact is a significant shift from the social sector's current paradigm of 'isolated impact,' because the underlying premise of collective impact is that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. There is no 'silver bullet' solution to systemic social problems and these problems cannot be solved by simply scaling or replicating one organization or program. Strong organizations are necessary but not sufficient for large-scale social change.

Not all social problems are suited for collective impact solutions. Collective impact is best employed for problems that are complex and systemic rather than technical in nature. Collective impact initiatives are currently being employed to address a wide variety of issues around the world, including education, healthcare, homelessness, the environment and community development. Many of these initiatives are already showing concrete results, reinforcing the promise of collective impact in solving complex social problems.
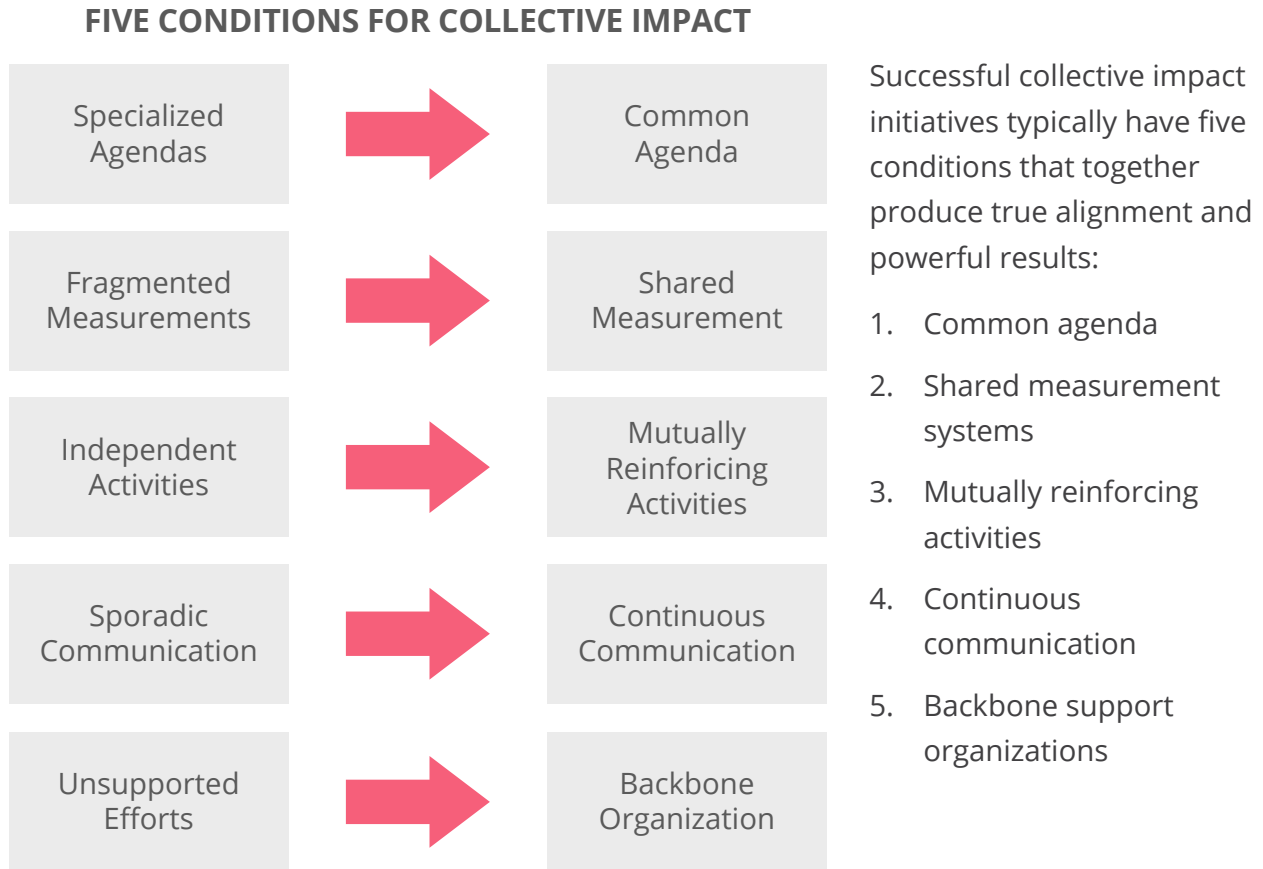
CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT SUCCESS

FIVE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Specialized Agendas →	Common Agenda
Fragmented Measurements →	Shared Measurement
Independent Activities →	Mutually Reinforcing Activities
Sporadic Communication →	Continuous Communication
Unsupported Efforts →	Backbone Organization

Figure 1: Five Conditions for Collective Impact

Successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and powerful results:

1. Common agenda

2. Shared measurement systems

3. Mutually reinforcing activities

4. Continuous communication

5. Backbone support organizations

These conditions for success provide a useful roadmap for your plan development process. It is wise to build your approach in such a way that it creates the conditions for success of the movement to end youth homelessness, rather than strictly looking at the production of a plan as your only objective.

Table 3: Collective Impact Success Factors & Youth Plans

KEY CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT SUCCESS	RELEVANCE TO YOUTH PLAN
Common Agenda: » All participants to have a shared vision for change » Common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions » Differences discussed and resolved » Participants agree on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole » Funders play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert	The planning process can create opportunity for diverse stakeholders (youth, government, funders, service providers, researchers and the private sector) to develop a shared vision around ending youth homelessness, a common understanding of the issue and agreement on a collaborative approach to solving it. The plan becomes the common agenda moving forward. A common agenda is about collective goals, rather than the interests of particular groups or individuals.
Shared Measurement Systems: » Shared measurement systems are essential to collective impact » Agreement on ways success will be measured and reported » Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at community level across all participating organizations » Common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes	Plan development creates agreement across stakeholders on system-level metrics and key performance indicators for ending youth homelessness as well as the means of tracking and reporting progress and performance on an ongoing basis across stakeholders.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities: » Diverse group of stakeholders working together » Coordination of their differentiated activities through mutually reinforcing plan of action » Each stakeholder takes on specific set of activities where they excel in a way that supports/is coordinated with others	The plan development process brings diverse stakeholders together to define common objectives as well as their particular roles in meeting these. Plan implementation guidance outlines necessary coordination infrastructure to execute the plan across diverse groups.

Continuous Communication:

» Trust among non-profits, corporations, and government agencies

» Several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other

» Monthly or biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders

» Creating a common vocabulary takes time, essential to shared measurement systems

» Time to see interests treated fairly, decisions made on evidence and best possible solution to problem, not to favouritism

Plan development, done well, will create opportunities for diverse stakeholders to develop common language around youth homelessness, surface and/or resolve tensions and enhance communication and mutual understanding. To create a plan, stakeholders rise above personal and organizational agendas to find best solutions. This helps build a foundation of trust and sets up essential coordinating infrastructure for implementation.

Backbone Support Organizations:

» Coordination requires supporting infrastructure

» Separate organization/staff with specific set of skills

» Ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, logistical and administrative details

» Embody principles of adaptive leadership: focus people's attention, create a sense of urgency, apply pressure without overwhelming, frame issues as opportunities and difficulties, mediate conflict

» Highly structured process that leads to effective decision making

Dedicated, highly capable human resources are essential to plan development. Plan development requires backbone supports to provide necessary administrative support to the development process, but also a project manager to quarterback the entire process. Adaptive leadership from a group of decision makers representative of the key sectors involved guides the overall direction of the plan and the work of the project manager. Plan champions (leaders who advance plan goals) are engaged strategically to advance common objectives and external expertise is brought in as necessary. Don't underestimate the work required to build and sustain trust with plan champions.

ESSENTIAL PLAN ELEMENTS

What does it take to end youth homelessness? The answer to this question should shape the main tenets of your plan and how you go about developing it. While there are a wide range of options, there are common elements that should be included in your plan, whether you're a small rural community or large urban centre; whether Indigenous youth or LGBTQ2S youth are overrepresented, etc.

If your community believes the answer is to develop more emergency services, such as shelters, or that the homeless-serving system can do it independently without changes to the operation of the wider public systems, your plan will be incomplete, which will lead to gaps in implementation and hinder your efforts to end youth homelessness.

The Reimagining our Response report contains a commonly used strategic framework for developing and implementing plans to end youth homelessness. Edmonton, Kamloops and St. John's specifically cite this report as grounding to their youth plans.

Gaetz proposes the following steps towards ending youth homelessness:

» Develop a plan

» Create an integrated system response

» Facilitate active, strategic and coordinated engagement by all levels of government and interdepartmental collaboration

» Adopt a youth development orientation

» Incorporate research, data gathering and information sharing

Gaetz's framework, a reorientation of the current response, involves three key approaches: a strong emphasis on prevention and strategies that move people quickly out of homelessness into appropriate accommodation with supports, reinforced by emergency services.
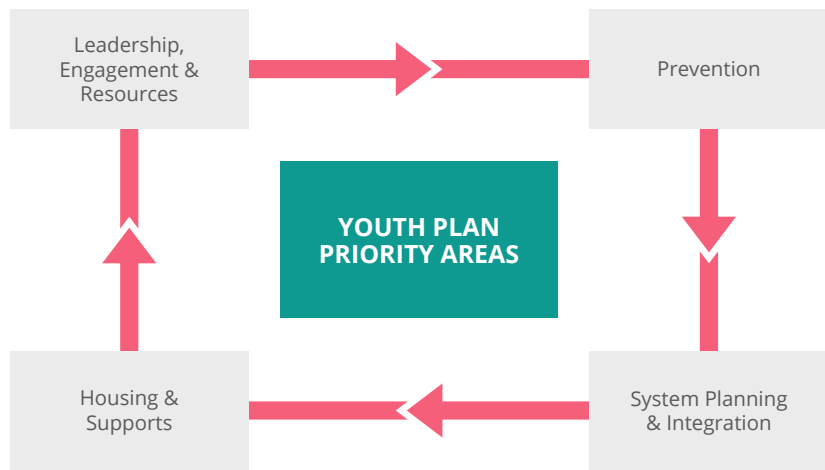
Figure 2: Prevention-focused Approach

To operationalize a prevention-focused approach, your youth plan must cover the four Youth Plan Priorities. These four elements are synthesized from the existing body of evidence and are commonly found in existing plans. While you should adapt these locally, according to your community's priorities and needs, the general approach should remain consistent across communities.

Figure 3: Youth Plan Priority Areas

Prevention can include measures that specifically target youth at risk of homelessness, through such programs as family mediation/reunification, working with the education system to identify those at risk earlier and developing policy options that can ensure youth are better supported in transitioning from foster care. The focus here is working upstream to identify those at risk of homelessness and putting in place interventions that effectively mitigate such risks.

System planning and integration refers to the type of reorganization actions you will need to introduce to ensure your local system serves youth effectively and efficiently. This includes introducing ways of managing the flow of clients better through coordinated entry, having consistent performance management and quality assurance standards in place, but also developing processes to link the youth-serving system to the public systems as well. Discharge protocols for youth coming out of treatment or finding ways to coordinate services between diverse systems can be included in this priority area.

Housing and supports refers to the network of services and accommodation options necessary to end homelessness for youth; diverse and appropriate housing and supports (case management, income assistance, education, health care, etc.) ensure that once rehoused, youth do not fall back into homelessness. To achieve this, you may need to expand particular program types or introduce new program models and housing stock. You may also need to rethink how services are delivered in practice. The way your emergency shelters and transitional housing program operate can also be re-envisioned to move youth into permanent housing quicker, for instance. The Housing First Framework for Youth provides guidance on housing options and supports designed to meet the needs of young people in a way that supports not only housing retention but also a supportive transition to adulthood.

Leadership, engagement and resources are needed to execute the vision set out in the plan. This includes funding, organizational infrastructure, champions to promote the solutions to diverse audiences and shared accountability among stakeholders for ending youth homelessness. Additionally, you may include public education measures to raise awareness about preventing and ending youth homelessness. You may also plan for a research agenda to enhance knowledge about the issue and advance a policy agenda to various levels of government.

Table 4: Priority Areas Resources

PRIORITY AREA	FURTHER READING
Prevention	Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice Prevention Framework Youth Employment Toolkit Toolkit: Early intervention programmes to prevent youth homelessness - some examples from the UK Reconnecting with Family & Community: Pathways Out of Youth Homelessness
System Planning & Service Integration	Beyond Housing First: Essential Elements of a System-Planning Approach to Ending Homelessness Performance Management in a Housing First Context: A Guide for Community Entities System Planning 101
Housing & Supports	Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada Homeless Young Adults Ages 18–24 Examining Service Delivery Adaptations Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit Toolkit for Practitioners/Researchers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth: Best Practices from the Rural Youth Survey
Leadership, Engagement & Resources	Time for Action: Report of the Homeless Voices Youth Action Squad

SYSTEM PLANNING & INTEGRATION IN BRIEF

What does a system planning and integration approach to youth homelessness entail? Efforts to end homelessness using system planning have been documented generally, but less has been done on youth-specific system planning.

As per the definition, a system is the integrated whole comprised of defined components working towards a common end. System planning requires a way of thinking that recognizes the basic components of a particular system and understands how these relate to one another as well as their basic function as part of the whole. Processes that ensure alignment across the system are integral to ensure components work together for maximum impact.

Processes that ensure alignment across the system are integral to ensure components work together for maximum impact.

Applying this concept to youth homelessness, a homeless-serving system comprises a diversity of local or regional service delivery components serving youth who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Integration is about working together to improve results, which can take the form of a collaborative arrangement. System-level integration can entail centralized management and funding, while at the service level it can involve the coordinated delivery of services both within (vertical integration) and/or between (horizontal integration) sectors and agencies.[1]

A plan to end youth homelessness is a call to address service and policy coordination and integration differently; it entails the restructuring of an entire local system's approach to youth homelessness following a new vision, as well as the integration of that system with others targeting homeless and at-risk youth. System planning requires a reorganization of the service delivery landscape using these shared principles, tying together the activities of diverse stakeholders across diverse systems toward the shared goal of reducing and preventing youth homelessness.

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1.   Browne, Gina, Dawn Kingston, Valerie Grdisa, and Maureen Markle-Reid. 2007. "Conceptualization and measurement of integrated human service networks for evaluation." *International Journal of Integrated Care* no. Oct.-Dec.:e51.

Housing and Urban Development's evaluation of homeless-serving systems in the U.S. found that successful integration was achieved when specific strategies were applied between systems, such as common policies and protocols, shared information, coordinated service delivery and training. In addition, the following were also recommended:

» Having staff with the responsibility to promote systems/service integration;

» Creating a local interagency coordinating body;

» Having a centralized authority for the homeless assistance system;

» Co-locating mainstream services within homeless-specific agencies and programs; and

» Adopting and using an interagency information management system.

These integration strategies can be applied in a range of contexts to improve outcomes, for instance programs within the same agency, between different agencies and between sectors of agencies.

The scale at which integration efforts are implemented will determine which strategies are best suited to achieve intended outcomes; further, the types of services that require integration will further impact the tailored approach moving forward. Several U.S. studies suggest that service coordination closest to the client is more effective than broader top-down structural integration measures in terms of individual housing and health outcomes.[2] Ultimately we need to ensure client and structural strategies are aligned first and foremost with impacting client-level results.[3]

The scale at which integration efforts are implemented will determine which strategies are best suited to achieve intended outcomes; further, the types of services that require integration will further impact the tailored approach moving forward

2.   U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. 2002. *Evaluation of Continuums of Care For Homeless People Final Report.*
      Hambrick, Ralph, and Debra Rog. 2000. "The Pursuit of Coordination: The Organizational Dimension in the Response to Homelessness." *Policy Studies Journal* no. 28 (2):353-364.
3.   Evans, T., Neale, K., Buultjens, J., & Davies, T. (2011). Service integration in a regional homelessness service system. Lismore, New South Wales, Australia: Northern Rivers Social Development Council. p. 30.

Table 5: Integration Strategies

CLIENT (SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL)	STRUCTURAL (PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION/POLICY LEVEL)
Shared information system	Shared guidelines
Co-location	Common targeting strategies
Joint staff training	Joint/pool funding arrangements
Interagency meetings	Protocols
Common application/referral processes	Memorandums of understanding
Joint delivery processes	Joint strategic/policy documents
Staff secondments	Agency /program amalgamations
Staff recruitment and volunteer programs	Shared resources (inc. transport)
Case conferencing/review	Joint administrative processes
Local resource registers	Joint planning
Provider-produced good practice guidelines	Cross and peer training
Monitoring and evaluation	Local forums/seminars/conferences
	Integration pilots or demonstration projects
	Monitoring and evaluation
	Regular promotions and publications

The table below summarizes the essentials of system planning and integration through a youth lens.

Table 6: System Planning Elements

FOCUS ON INTEGRATION WITHIN HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEM	FOCUS ON INTEGRATION BETWEEN HOMELESS-SERVING & OTHER SYSTEMS
Planning & Strategy Development	
Local strategy follows shared vision and principles grounded in evidence-based practice to end youth homelessness.	Development of shared planning approaches across systems targeting common target population.
Organizational Infrastructure	
Organizational infrastructure is in place to implement youth homelessness plan and coordinate the homeless-serving system to meet common goals.	Coordinating infrastructure to lead integration efforts across systems is established.
System Mapping	
Making sense of existing services serving youth and creating order moving forward.	Extending service mapping to document populations experiencing homelessness and housing instability touch points across systems.
Coordinated Service Delivery	
Ensuring key system alignment processes including coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization are in place to facilitate access and flow through services for best individual and system-level outcomes.	Development of coordinated access, assessment and prioritization to determine service matching for clients across systems using shared processes & facilitate integrated service delivery.
Integrated Information Management	
Shared information system aligns data collection, reporting, coordinated entry, assessment, referrals and service coordination in the homeless youth-serving system.	Extending the use of a shared information system or developing data bridges among existing systems to enable information sharing for service coordination and planning purposes.
Performance Management & Quality Assurance	
Performance expectations at the program and system levels are articulated; these are aligned and monitored along set service standards to achieve best outcomes for youth. Resources are in place to support uptake across organizational levels.	Common indicators are developed across similar service types and at system levels to articulate how components fit as part of broader whole. Service quality standards are in place across systems providing similar function, reinforced through monitoring and capacity building.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REGIONALIZED APPROACHES

Effectively, the key elements of homeless-serving systems will have to be reformulated and conjoined with partner regions to develop a streamlined, integrated response to youth homelessness for rural areas. The key homeless system components will need to be extended across the target region in service delivery. This may mean a further reach from existing community providers into other rural areas, rural providers delivering locally or via urban-rural partnerships.

To interpret system of care components for youth in a regional context, a number of issues should be considered.

Table 7: Homeless-system & Regional Integration Elements

FOCUS ON INTEGRATION WITHIN HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEM	FOCUS ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES
Planning & Strategy Development	
Local strategy follows shared vision and principles grounded in evidence-based practice to end youth homelessness.	Development of shared planning approaches across defined regions targeting a common target population of youth.
Organizational Infrastructure	
Organizational infrastructure is in place to implement youth homelessness plan and coordinate the homeless-serving system to meet common goals.	Coordinating infrastructure to lead integration efforts across regions is established.
System Mapping	
Making sense of existing services serving youth and creating order moving forward.	Extending service mapping to document youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability touch points across defined regions.
Coordinated Service Delivery	
Ensuring key system alignment processes including coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization are in place to facilitate access and flow through services for best individual and system-level outcomes.	Development of coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization to determine service matching for youth across systems using shared processes & facilitate integrated service delivery. Likely, decentralized but coordinated access will best support regionalization.

Integrated Information Management	
Shared information system aligns data collection, reporting, coordinated entry, assessment, referrals and service coordination in the homeless youth-serving system.	Extending the use of a shared information system or developing data bridges among existing systems to enable information sharing for service coordination and planning purposes.
Performance Management & Quality Assurance	
Performance expectations at the program and system levels are articulated; these are aligned and monitored along set service standards to achieve best outcomes for youth. Resources are in place to support uptake across organizational levels.	Common indicators are developed across similar service types across region to articulate how components fit as part of broader whole. Service quality standards are in place across participating region partners, reinforced through monitoring and capacity building.

Regional Coordination: To fully implement a regional system planning approach, particularly in small rural communities, coordination infrastructure must be developed to enable system planning and integrated service delivery. Certain functions may be centralized to maximize impact, though each regional partner will maintain an autonomous role in the consortium. The backbone supports involved in implementing a regional plan to end youth homelessness will need to be responsive and representative of a broader collective of stakeholders across localities.

System Planning & Integration: A regional youth plan will have to address system coordination, research, best practices, HMIS/HIFIS, funding coordination and policy analysis to support an end to youth homelessness across localities. The plan will also have to focus strategies on integration within regions and across public systems relevant to youth.

Funding Coordination: You may also need to think about how the plan can advance processes related to program performance management and improvement that are regional in nature to ensure system planning occurs across communities.

Regional HMIS/HIFIS Operations: If implementing HIFIS or HMIS for a larger region, appropriate staffing and training support will be needed. Analysis of system data regionally will need to be undertaken to enable performance management and ongoing strategy development in support of the youth plan.

Research & Homeless Counts: You may want to engage regional partners to develop and implement a research agenda to provide a better understanding of youth homelessness across the region and its unique dynamics in each locality. This will include analysis of HMIS and homeless count data, but will be enhanced by additional population-specific research on key issues, such as LGBTQ2S homelessness, Indigenous youth homelessness, migration trends, etc.

Assessment and referral protocols, standards of service quality and indicators of success can be developed with a regional lens, even if locally key funders take on appropriate monitoring in the day-to-day work.

Training & Capacity Building: In terms of training and capacity building, assigning common training and technical assistance needs to the broader regional consortium can ensure local needs are met without adding to the burden on a single agency.

Quality Assurance & Performance Management: Quality assurance pieces that are common to regional partners can also be strengthened by collective work on implementing the youth plan. Assessment and referral protocols, standards of service quality and indicators of success can be developed with a regional lens, even if locally key funders take on appropriate monitoring in the day-to-day work.

Regional Service Delivery: The key elements of homeless-serving systems will have to be reformulated and conjoined with partner regions to develop a streamlined, integrated response to youth homelessness for rural areas. The key homeless system components will need to be extended across the target region in service delivery. This may mean a further reach from existing community providers into other rural areas, rural providers delivering locally or via urban-rural partnerships.

To interpret system of care components for youth in a regional context, a number of issues should be considered:

» Is there sufficient demand for a service component in a particular site?

» Is it cost efficient to centralize or decentralize service?

» Can outreach services be provided across communities?

» Which services are best centralized in the urban centre?

» Are there sufficient capacity/resources to deliver services locally?

BUILDING ON BROADER HOMELESSNESS PLANS

It's essential that you consider how the proposed direction of the youth plan aligns with the broader community's work on homelessness. If there is a plan to end homelessness, you will need to outline how the youth plan aligns with it. You will have to be sensitive to the politics involved vis-à-vis other groups who may be advancing solutions for other populations, like women or, Indigenous people. It is an unfortunate reality that such priorities are often pitted against each other in the competition for limited resources and visibility.

Your community likely has, at minimum, an HPS community plan in place. Given the focus on chronic and episodic homelessness, you will have to make a case that funds should be allocated to youth even in cases where they don't fit the federal definition of chronic and episodic. However, it is likely that your plan will include a funding ask for your provincial/territorial and local government as well, where the accountability for youth services, homeless supports, income assistance, etc., often lies.

If your community does not have a plan to end homelessness, you may be able to leverage the youth plan development process to highlight the need for this. You can make the case that by addressing youth homelessness first, your community can build an approach that can be revised and applied to other populations over time as well.

Since the youth plan is focused on addressing homelessness, it is important to also consider what general homelessness plans call for in terms of essential elements. In its document A Plan Not a Dream, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness provides guidance around four key elements of plans to end homelessness. The CAEH built its approach on the National Alliance to End Homelessness' Ten Essentials Toolkit for Ending Homelessness.

Since the youth plan is focused on addressing homelessness, it is important to also consider what general homelessness plans call for in terms of essential elements.

CAEH ELEMENTS OF PLANS TO END HOMELESSNESS

Plan for outcomes

In order to end homelessness, you need a plan. Successful community plans are evidence-based; have measurable and ambitious outcomes and key milestones; are learning, living and adaptive documents; cover the 10 Essentials; and, critically, are the product of an inclusive community process that engages key players in the local homeless system, including people with lived experience.

Research and data management are central to developing effective responses, coordinating systems and measuring outcomes. If you want to move forward, you need to understand the problem. You also need to be able to tell if you are having an impact. Basic research on homelessness in terms of causes, lived experience and solutions makes for better policy and practice. Information management systems, such as Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), are being applied in Canada. HMIS allow for system-wide data collection and sharing across the system and ensure that you can really measure progress. Instituting a culture of program evaluation within the system means that we can highlight practical and effective program models and practices, and also demonstrate results.

Close the front door

The most cost-effective way to end homelessness for people is to stop it before it begins with effective prevention. Homeless people travel a predictable path into homelessness. On their way into homelessness, every single individual or family comes into contact with a person, program or system that could prevent their homelessness. In order to end homelessness, communities need a thoughtful and methodical prevention strategy that includes: early detection; emergency assistance; policy and practice reforms to mainstream systems that inadvertently contribute to homelessness; system coordination; housing and support services; and access to income necessary to sustain housing through employment or mainstream income support as required.

Open the back door

For the vast majority of homeless Canadians, homelessness is a short-term phenomenon. A small but significant minority become trapped in homelessness or cycle in and out of homelessness throughout their lives. There are effective initiatives that move people from homelessness to a stable home. These need to be a cornerstone of a plan to end homelessness. Successful community plans include strategies for rapid re-housing, housing support services and coordinated systems with the express intent to shorten the duration of homelessness.

Core to effective community plans is the concept of Housing First. Housing First is a successful and transformational housing model used in a number of Canadian and American communities. Housing First puts the priority on a rapid and direct move from homelessness to housing, instead of requiring people to graduate through a series of steps before getting into permanent housing. Housing First is not housing only. Integral to the Housing First philosophy are the services and supports necessary to sustain that housing and create long-term independence.

Build the infrastructure

While systems can be changed to prevent and shorten the experience of homelessness, ultimately people will continue to be threatened with instability until the supply of affordable housing is increased; incomes of people living in poverty are sufficient to meet their basic needs; and disadvantaged people receive the support services they need.

DETERMINING COMMUNITY READINESS

How do you know your community is ready to undertake a large-scale initiative to end youth homelessness? Given that ending youth homelessness is a collective impact endeavour, your group can benefit from a readiness assessment to identify deficits you may need to address before moving the planning process forward.

The FSG Collective Impact Readiness Assessment is an excellent tool to gauge whether your community currently has critical elements/processes in place. It can help you identify whether significant time and resources will be needed to either begin or complete critical processes. A similar tool from FSG also points readers to resources to complement their efforts. Another self-assessment was developed by Innoweave to help members of a collaborative reflect on their readiness to take on collective impact. These tools are useful to give you a sense of readiness and identify areas of strength or where additional efforts are needed as you take on the actual planning work from a collective impact lens.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness has developed a Community Self-Assessment intended to stimulate thinking around key concepts critical to ending homelessness. This tool uses factors identified through the U.S. 100,000 Homes Campaign to be associated with higher housing placement rates for chronic and vulnerable homeless people and essential elements of system planning in a Housing First context. It aims to gauge a community's current status against the framework, but also acts as a means of beginning the long-term work to set up new ways of delivering service and coordinating local homelessness responses. The resource is set up as a workbook with pointed questions that are intended to prompt these strategic conversations to occur in your community.

These tools are useful to give you a sense of readiness and identify areas of strength or where additional efforts are needed as you take on the actual planning work from a collective impact lens.

The following characteristics of communities that are effective at ending homelessness can be useful to help you think through community capacity around ending youth homelessness, as opposed to taking on plan development. The list below is intended to help you think through elements of a youth plan based on CAEH's Community Self-Assessment. These can also help you think through community readiness locally to take on the youth plan work.

You may find the following self-assessment useful to gauge 'readiness' for collective impact by identifying which preconditions the group is well prepared for or will need further investment in.

Current Situation Strong: These elements/processes are either fully in place or sufficient progress has been made in them so that they are operationally functional in the context of the initiative.

Significant Investment Needed: The group does not currently have these elements/processes in place. There is an incomplete or unclear plan to accomplish this goal and/or significant time and resources will need to be allocated to either begin or complete this process.

Some Investment Needed: While these elements/processes are not fully in place, significant thought and planning has gone into these elements. Time and resources have been allocated and clear progress is being made.

The first assessment highlights key elements supporting readiness to take on the plan development work, versus the second assessment focuses on implementing a plan to end youth homelessness. Together, these tools will give you a sense of the work ahead and may be useful to come back to as you continue this journey.

*Table 8: Community Readiness for Collective Impact Work on
Developing & Implementing a Plan to End Youth Homelessness*

COMMUNITY READINESS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT WORK ON DEVELOPING A PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT NEEDED	CURRENT SITUATION STRONG	SOME INVESTMENT NEEDED
Backbone Support Organizations			
Is the backbone actively supporting aligned activities through convening partners, providing technical assistance and recruiting new partners?			
Has a structure for the backbone been clearly decided (i.e. planning group consisting of project coordinator, steering committee, working committees)?			
Have resources been allocated to support the backbone infrastructure over the course of plan development?			
Has the backbone supports group begun to build public will with consensus and commitment through communications management, articulating the call to action and supporting community member engagement activities?			
Is the backbone supports group advocating for an aligned policy agenda around ending youth homelessness?			
Is the backbone supports group actively aligning public and private funding to support the initiative's goals?			

Continuous Communication			
There is an up-to-date map of the players, strategies and work underway relevant to youth homelessness.			
A workplan has been established to see the plan development through, with clear deliverables, timelines and accountabilities.			
Planning group has a formalized Terms of Reference document outlining common objectives, roles and decision-making processes.			
Plan working group has established all necessary committees by locality or activity areas.			
Have meeting schedules been established for activity-focused sub-groups? Will these meetings occur yearly? Monthly? Weekly?			
Has a list of prioritized activities and next steps been written so that the different groups working on the youth plan are coordinated around a common agenda?			

Common Agenda			
Do we have all of the necessary, high-level system leaders at the table? These include priority systems from service providers, Indigenous leadership and public systems including: education, child protection, mental health, health, criminal justice, etc.			
Do we have authentic representation of diverse perspectives within this group, including youth with lived experience who have directly experienced the challenges we seek to solve?			
Does the planning group have an explicit definition of the problem in agreed-upon language to refer to?			
Has the planning group agreed upon the scope of consultations? (i.e. which stakeholders need/do not need to be involved? What is the best means of engaging them?)			
Has the planning group written a vision, mission statement and guiding principles for the youth plan work?			
Has the group defined system-level strategies as well as program-level strategies as part of the youth plan work?			

Shared Measurement			
Resources are allocated to develop and implement a shared measurement strategy as part of the youth plan.			
Research to develop a thorough understanding of youth homelessness in the community is in place/underway to ground the plan.			
Diverse sources of information and data are located and analyzed to build plan priorities.			
Plan development includes costing analysis, projected impacts, measurable targets and performance indicators.★			

★ Note that the COH is working to develop a national definition of "Functional Zero" that will help you think through the key elements needed and measures you may want to include in developing plan targets. Also look to examples of performance measures in the Developing Targets and Performance Indicators section.

COMMUNITY READINESS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT WORK ON IMPLEMENTING A PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT NEEDED	CURRENT SITUATION STRONG	SOME INVESTMENT NEEDED
Planning & Strategy Development			
A plan to end youth homelessness is in place.			
A consistent definition of youth homelessness is used.			
An end to youth homelessness is defined.			
Plan includes common objectives and target dates for completing them.			
Plan uses data on total numbers of homeless youth, annual inflow and outflow and the housing placement rate needed to end youth homelessness during a specific time period.			
Plan is used to guide services and interventions.			
Plan has buy-in from other providers and related systems i.e. mental health, health, criminal justice, child protection, etc.			
Ongoing processes are in place whereby stakeholders plan their response to youth homelessness in a coordinated manner.			
Strategic reviews are done regularly to assess progress against common objectives and adjust approach in real time.			

Organizational Infrastructure & Funding			
Leaders in the community serve key coordination roles of:			
» Head of organization(s) working on ending youth homelessness locally			
» Data/information management lead			
» Public policy advocate			
» Lived experience advocate			
Diverse stakeholders have strong, pre-existing relationships that strengthen the community's work on ending youth homelessness.			
Mechanisms are in place to coordinate funding streams.			
Community decision making is being done on a coordinated, system-wide level regarding coordinated entry, acuity assessment and prioritization, performance management and service standards.			

Coordinated Service Delivery			
Community can organize diverse programs and housing serving youth by clearly defined program types, with specific eligibility criteria, target groups and performance measures.			
Community can perform system-wide gap and performance analysis in terms of program types and population groups, including youth.			
Community has mechanism in place to quickly determine if a young person experiencing homelessness is eligible for services and benefits and can quickly refer them appropriately.			
Those experiencing homelessness, including youth, are known by name and tracked throughout the homeless-serving system.			
Programs have established effective links with complementary community and mainstream services (e.g. employment, health, treatment, education, community integration, family reunification, counselling, child protection, probation, etc).			

Integrated Information Management			
A system/process is in place to maintain an unduplicated real-time list of all youth experiencing homelessness.			
A database(s) exists to track the progress/movement within the system of all youth experiencing homelessness.			
A system-wide privacy policy is in place that accounts for the needs and legal circumstances of youth.			
A process is in place to assess youth homelessness trends including inflow, housing placement, client characteristics and needs and impacts of interventions.			
Performance Management & Quality Assurance			
Common standards of care across various housing and programs serving youth experiencing homelessness are in place.			
Capacity exists to assess performance between like programs and across the homeless-serving system.			
Standardized outcome targets for emergency shelter, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing are established regardless of funder.			

System Integration			
Formalized processes are in place to work with public system partners to avoid discharging youth into homelessness; priority systems include: child protection, health and justice.			
Community stakeholders have regular contact with elected officials within the various levels of government.			
Community is active in advancing public policy asks to support an end to youth homelessness to various levels of government.			
Government Support			
Government prioritizes ending youth homelessness; this can be evidenced by high level direction-setting policy/plan to end homelessness, etc.			
Government provides adequate resources to enation its direction.			
A point of accountability is identified within government on ending homelessness and youth homelessness.			
Government has taken steps to enhance policy coordination across departments to advance ending homelessness goals.			
Government direction advances service integration at the community level.			
A specific government department is a natural fit for the work required. This natural fit includes a champion.			

Community Engagement			
Mechanisms are in place ensure those with lived experience are meaningfully engaged in plan development and implementation. This includes models of peer support in service delivery.			
Research evidence and data is consistently used to inform plan implementation and adjust approach in real time.			
Communication among plan stakeholders is effective ensuring activities across diverse groups move a common agenda forward.			
There is public awareness and support for the plan.			
Community members, including religious groups and volunteers, are actively engaged in implementation.			
The plan is being championed by diverse groups and individuals with influence.			

SO DO YOU REALLY NEED A PLAN?

After all that, how do you know that a youth plan is the right thing to do for your community? Alternatively, when does a plan NOT make sense?

Though there is no yes/no quiz to tell you a definitive answer, a Collective Impact Community Readiness Assessment (see Section 2) can inform your decision. The important point is that you are aiming to build a movement, not strictly a plan. You may also consider alternatives to a youth plan, as other communities have successfully done to move the agenda on ending youth homelessness forward.

1

A PLAN FOR A PLAN

In St. John's, Newfoundland, Choices for Youth – a lead service delivery agency – worked with national experts to convene a roundtable on youth homelessness responses and developed a call to action to the provincial government asking for a strategy and resources aligned with best practices.

St. John's approach leveraged existing research in a relatively short timeframe (about one year) to create a sense of urgency, engage provincial stakeholders, propose an evidence-based direction and advance system reform. In this case, rather than developing a city-specific youth plan, Choices for Youth and its partners launched a document calling for a provincial plan, which laid out the essentials of what that provincial plan should also entail.

2

A YOUTH STRATEGY WITHIN A PLAN
TO END HOMELESSNESS

Another option is to develop a youth strategy within the context of a broader community plan to end homelessness. Edmonton's approach was to work with stakeholders to develop the broad directions of a youth-specific strategy that dovetailed the pre-existing plan to end homelessness, rather than create a parallel plan.

This approach allowed the community to focus on implementation fairly quickly, as it built on the infrastructure already developed by Homeward Trust on system planning and integration, information management and service design.

3

PILOTING WHILE PLANNING

Another option to consider is to begin implementation while developing the plan. In Alberta's case, when the 7 Cities began experimenting with Housing First, there were no formal plans to end homelessness in place. That did not stop communities from adapting innovative, evidence-based practices while working on the research and development of their longer-term strategies.

Of course, there is a risk involved as the new pilot initiative may not fit perfectly with the eventual plan priorities – yet the benefits of demonstrating success while developing a plan cannot be underestimated either. In many ways, Alberta's 7 Cities were successful in advancing the needs of enhanced provincial funding for Housing First because of the success of these early pilots and reinforced through the provincial commitment to end homelessness.

4

A PLAN WITHIN A PLAN

Alberta has experienced success in addressing homelessness through the 10-Year Plan. Since its inception in 2009, more than 12,250 homeless Albertans have received housing and supports and approximately 73% remain successfully housed, but we can do more. The 10-Year Plan states that Albertans from specialized groups, including homeless youth, are dealing with particularly challenging issues and require targeted responses to be rehoused. Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness aligns and is integral to work being led through the 10-Year Plan. The Youth Plan represents the next step in the 10-Year Plan and is a targeted response to a specialized population.