

youth homelessness

how many homeless youth are there?

There are an estimated 157,000 people who are homeless each year in Canada, with **65,000 estimated youth***.¹ Because they have different risk factors and face different challenges, homeless youth must be viewed as a separate entity from the adult homeless population.

Within Greater Victoria, the *2008 Youth Housing Survey* by the *Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria* conservatively estimates the number of **youth and young adults facing homeless in Greater Victoria at 616**.²

is youth homelessness increasing?

Service providers working with homeless youth and youth at risk in Greater Victoria believe these numbers are on the rise. This assumption is supported by data and trends in other cities like Vancouver—where youth homelessness saw a 29% increase since 2008.³

why are homeless youth hard to find?

As many as 80% of youth experiencing homelessness **do not sleep rough on the streets, but are “hidden”**.⁸ Youth may not be able to access certain shelters designated for adults or women only.⁹ They may be sleeping in cars, at friends’ or strangers’ houses or couch surfing.¹⁰ Youth experiencing homelessness are a transient population, often living in five or more different places over a one year period.¹¹

* The term “youth” commonly refers to those between 12-30 years of age.

¹ Trypuc, B., & Robinson, J. (2009). Homeless in Canada. *Charity Intelligence Canada*

² Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria. (2008). A youth housing study for BC’s capital region.

³ Org Code. (2011). Metro Vancouver Homeless Count 2011

Preliminary Report.

⁴ Winland, D. Gaetz, S. Patton, T. (2011) Family Matters - Homeless youth and Eva’s Initiatives “Family Reconnect” Program.

⁵ Winland, D et al. (2011)

⁶ Ending youth homelessness, (2012). Ending youth

homelessness. *Canadian Housing and Renewal Association Policy*

how do youth become homeless?

There are push and pull factors that make homelessness the only option for some youth.⁴ Push factors include family conflict, sexual orientation, poverty, abuse and neglect, learning and development disabilities, and alienation; pull factors include substance abuse, addiction, and relationships.⁵ Youth who leave living situations of conflict or abuse are often distrustful of adults, making it difficult to access the few services run by adults that are available to help youth escape homelessness.⁶

Many youth are employed and try to acquire housing, but their age and inexperience leads to barriers: most jobs for youth are part-time and low-wage, so it is difficult to pay for high rent costs, utilities, internet and phone bills. Other barriers to housing include age discrimination and limitations, such as a lack of income assistance or rental references.⁷

⁷ Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria. (2008).

⁸ Evenson, J. Youth homelessness in Canada: the road to solutions. (2009) Raising the Roof

⁹ Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria. (2008).

¹⁰ Evenson, J (2009)

¹¹ Evenson, J (2009)

what are the impacts of homelessness on youth?

Youth experiencing homelessness are extremely vulnerable. Marginalized and street-involved youth are three times more likely to be physically and sexually abused than housed youth the same age.¹² They also lack adequate supports to lead a healthy life in their developmental transition period from childhood to adulthood. **Homelessness poses serious threats on a youth's physical and emotional health.**¹³

physical health:

Homeless youth have higher rates of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection and sexually transmitted infections (STI's) when compared to their housed peers.¹⁴ They often report experiencing what they call “**street sickness**,” which is a general feeling of malaise.¹⁵ These maladies occur as a result of **sleep deprivation, exposure to the elements, and the inability to maintain proper hygiene.**¹⁶ Another area of concern is poor nutrition, as it aggravates existing conditions and hinders proper immune function.¹⁷ Proper nutrition is essential in the growth of youth to assure proper health through growth spurts, and brain and muscle development that occur at the onset of and throughout puberty.¹⁸

emotional health:

Anxiety and stress are common among all youth, but can be heightened as a result of homelessness.¹⁹ Many homeless youth suffer from Major Depression Disorder or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.²⁰ Stress can increase the risk of disease, illness and other mental health issues. Homeless youth also have a very high rate of suicide, which is the second largest killer of youth in BC after motor vehicle accidents.²¹ Of the youth surveyed in *Against the Odds*, more than half reported mental and emotional health concerns, and 45% of homeless youth made one or more attempts at suicide within one calendar year, compared to 14% of their housed peers.²²

there is hope

Youth are resilient and optimistic. Those facing homelessness often do not see themselves as homeless, they believe they are just temporarily without a place to live. There are currently organizations and supports for youth in Greater Victoria, like Salvation Army, Youth Empowerment Society, Threshold Housing, and Beacon Community Services. Their programs have had real success by empowering youth to look after themselves and to have a structured and stable existence during the critical transition period from youth to adulthood. They also work in partnership with families to enable youth to remain at home. More support for organisations like these will help address youth homelessness.

how do we prevent youth homelessness?

To prevent youth homelessness, it is essential first to **continue to address immediate needs** for shelter, food, counsellors, addiction treatment, and medical care, as well as supports for youth discharged from medical or correctional facilities and those aging out of government care. It is necessary to provide life skill and job training services, and youth-specific supported housing.²³ Supported housing is a cost-effective model that provides both housing and support services to youth.

It is important also to **prevent youth homelessness with adequate services and early intervention.**²⁴ Counselling supports must be put in place to enable youth to live at home and resolve family-related issues; if the household is unsafe, appropriate services for youth to live outside their home must be accessible.²⁵ We recognize the hard work and effort of teachers and schools to mentor and support youth in need. Unfortunately, with limited time, funding and resources they are unable to ensure no one falls through the cracks. On all federal and provincial levels, policies for homeless youth—distinct from policies for the adult homeless population—must work to protect and prevent youth homelessness.²⁶

¹² Smith, A., Saewyc, E., Albert, M., MacKay, L., Northcott, M., and The McCreary Centre Society (2007). *Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC*. Vancouver, BC: The McCreary Centre Society

¹³ Ensign, J., & Bell, M. (2004). Illness experiences of homeless youth. *Qualitative health research*

¹⁴ Tyler, Kimberly; Whitbeck, Les B.; Chen, Xiaojin; and Johnson, Kurt, "Sexual Health of Homeless Youth: Prevalence and Correlates of Sexually Transmissible Infections" (2007). Sociology Department, Faculty Publications.

¹⁵ Higgitt, N., Wingert, S., & Ristock, J. (2003). *Voices from the margins: experiences of street-involved youth in Winnipeg*.

¹⁶ Higgitt, N. et al. (2003)

¹⁷ Goodacre, Collins, & Slattery, (2009). Nutrition and youth.

¹⁸ Goodacre et al. (2009)

¹⁹ Evenson, J (2009)

²⁰ Smith, A, et al (2007)

²¹ Smith, A, et al (2007)

²² Smith, A, et al. (2007)

²³ Evenson, J (2009)

²⁴ Evenson, J (2009)

²⁵ Evenson, J (2009)

²⁶ Evenson, J (2009)

²⁶ Evenson, J (2009)