



Rights and Preventing Youth Homelessness

Canada needs to focus more on prevention and early intervention to reduce chronically high rates of youth homelessness. A 2016 national survey showed:

- Youth between ages 13-24 are about 20% of the homeless population;
- 40% experienced homelessness before age 16; 75% had multiple experiences;
- younger people experienced greater adversity on the street;
- 60% experienced some form of childhood trauma, abuse, or adversity prior to leaving home; and
- homeless youth have experienced higher rates of dropping out of school, bullying, and time in the child welfare system.

See: [Without a Home](#) and other research documents for additional analysis.

Children's Rights and Preventing Homelessness

The second review of children's rights in 2003 asked Canada to: identify the causes of youth homelessness; strengthen support services for street youth; pay attention to vulnerable groups; and take measures to reduce and prevent its occurrence. Canada did not respond in its following reports, in spite of requests to do so. During that time, rates of youth homelessness and the costs of crisis response have increased. Waiting too long to do anything is identified as a major problem in Canada. New calls for comprehensive and coordinated prevention strategies converge with calls to take the implementation of children's rights more seriously in Canada. See [Ending Youth Homelessness: A Human Rights Guide](#) for more details.

Critical Factors for Success

- Start early.
- Respond rapidly to the first incidence of homelessness.
- Support young people at risk before age 16.
- Take a systems approach.
- Address all factors through multi-sectoral partnerships.

See [Without A Home](#) for more detailed recommendations.

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Identified Areas of Action

Focus on prevention and early intervention instead of waiting until crises occur

By working together, communities, schools, and municipal governments can put systems in place to provide child-centered support and respond early to the factors known to contribute to children leaving home.

Pay early, focused attention to vulnerable groups, based on the available research.

Share good practices in preventive programming.



Use rights-based, systems approaches

Youth housing policy needs to be a “fusion policy.” Housing is a right, and the factors that prevent homelessness are also rights. Paying attention to all aspects of children’s rights in developing public policies will increase effectiveness and save money in the long term. Canada’s new national housing legislation includes some rights-based tools that could be helpful. Adding a focused national plan to prevent youth homelessness would contribute to fulfilling Canada’s obligations under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* as well.



Solve Problems with Young People

Build resilience by engaging young people in finding solutions as soon as issues are identified, with a focus on their strengths and abilities. End the culture of waiting until there is a crisis situation to offer help.

Community-based programs with young people need coherent provincial and federal policies to close gaps.

Complaint mechanisms for young people need quick responses and problem-solving approaches.

Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children and A Way Home

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