

Homelessness should have a human face...



Sooner or later someone you encounter in your office, classroom, clinic or workplace will be at risk of homelessness.

In that moment, you can make the difference between a temporary crisis and a human tragedy.

You know their stories: management sweeps, relationship breakdowns, young people in conflict or fleeing abuse, addiction, illness, emotional distress ...

Today, the spiral from stability to distress can start in the space of a five-minute meeting.

Here are some facts that can help you. No one needs to feel helpless in the face of homelessness. Often, all it takes is knowing who to call.

As someone who works with people, your network already includes a wide range of resources that can help you prevent another family or individual from hitting the streets. And, your network can be expanded.

- TAKE the challenge.
- COMMIT to finding the people with the resources your residents, clients, patients, students or employees need to prevent their own homelessness.
- LEARN about the issue.
- TALK with your colleagues.
- SPREAD the word.
- GET INVOLVED TODAY!

Chances are that organizations in your community are helping people face the issue of homelessness with human solutions that really work.

Why not join them?
Short of time this year?

Your donation to Raising the Roof supports community-based programs with the goal of finding long-term solutions for Canada's homeless.

Take homelessness personally.
Your support makes a difference.



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Homelessness is a serious health issue. For some individuals, illness is the primary cause of their homelessness. For almost all, illness will occur or get worse as a result of homelessness. Addressing homelessness is an important illness prevention strategy in any healthy community.

Raising the Roof's website (www.raisingtheroof.org) offers more than 100 examples of how health care professionals have prevented homelessness in their communities. The goals, funding and delivery agencies are identified for these innovative practices, along with more sources of information, including a library of the best of print and electronic sources of information about health care and homelessness prevention.

understand the issue

know and watch for the warning signs

When it comes to homelessness, there is no single test to determine who is "at risk." But, one thing is clear: for people who have little or no supports, chronic illness and disability put them at risk of a downward spiral to homelessness – whether from job loss, poverty, family conflict, substance abuse, eviction, domestic violence or other trauma. If you suspect that any of these risk factors apply to your patient, please ask discreetly about them.

Some other warning signs are easy to recognize: malnutrition as a sign of extreme poverty, for example, injuries consistent with physical abuse, or symptoms that show personal distress. Many common medical conditions – including substance abuse and psychiatric illness – put people at risk of homelessness.

Watch for people who are often particularly vulnerable: youth with difficult family relationships, a pregnant teenager without family support, a new patient or client who recently moved to the community and has no secure housing, and people who have recently been in long-term health care facilities, half-way houses, foster care, or served time.

You can help. Make inquiries about housing status as part of your routine interview process. Learn to recognize the cues that say "this person is at risk." Above all, become an advocate for your client or patient, and for others at risk of homelessness in your community.

connect with or create the homelessness prevention team in your community

No one can prevent homelessness alone – neither health care practitioners nor individuals at risk. Growing awareness of the epidemic of homelessness in many communities has resulted in the creation of networks of service providers coming together to shape a response – from housing, financial and service groups, to government and policy people, to city planners, to employment and education services, to private businesses and landlords.

If such a group does not exist in your community, consider taking the lead to form your own network. Talk to peers in the health services sector. Document what resources are available among you and how to access them. Your community's public health or community health staff can also bring knowledge of available services. By taking steps to pool knowledge and resources now, you will know who to call when you need solutions to help one of your patients or clients.

Collectively, you can research, create and support existing homelessness prevention strategies in your community. You can ensure that strategies that have been tried in your community and the lessons learned from them are shared widely. Sometimes, your collective work will lead to innovative practices like those available on the Raising the Roof website at www.raisingtheroof.org. (You'll find lots of ideas here for reference and inspiration.)

When you care for people's health, you necessarily care about rising homelessness. Thousands of Canadians suffer profound health consequences every year, all victims of the current homelessness epidemic. The costs for communities are high, too.

Write, speak out and tell your elected officials what you see and what you want done about it. Become an advocate for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Support the development, funding and protection of affordable housing in your community. Your voice lends credibility to the arguments for adequate income and social supports, and for policies and programs to increase the supply of affordable housing. Act to support health programs and initiatives in other sectors that can prevent some of the root causes of homelessness – locally, provincially and federally.

you know homelessness
is a major health issue
make sure others know, too

