

# 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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**H**omelessness has escalated exponentially since federal and provincial governments have stopped funding social housing construction. When there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing, homelessness is inevitable. In most cities, homelessness is also directly related to low vacancy rates. Tight or heated housing markets make it hard for anyone to find housing. For individuals or families trying to live on minimum wage, a basic pension or other fixed incomes, it is especially difficult, even in "normal" times.

Decent, safe, secure affordable housing is fundamental to individual and family stability and health, and, in turn, to the stability and health of the community.

As urban land and development costs have risen, it has become unprofitable for private developers to build new affordable rental housing. Often, it is older affordable housing stock that is lost to re-development. As well, it is becoming more difficult for many individuals and families to continue to afford their current housing, even if they reside in existing affordable housing. Long waiting lists are evidence of the desperate need for more social housing.

Raising the Roof's website ([www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org)) offers 150 illustrations of how housing providers and other agencies are preventing homelessness by helping people access and maintain secure housing. You'll find details on the goals, funding and delivery agencies of these innovative practices, along with more sources of information, including a library of the best print and electronic information sources on developers, landlords and housing service providers who are breaking new ground in homelessness prevention.

*understand the issue*

*know and watch for the warning signs*

**W**hen it comes to homelessness, there is no single test to determine who is "at risk". Whether you work in a community agency, a housing corporation, society or co-op, a registry, or a city planning department, you know how many tenants are at risk of homelessness and how many were facing certain homelessness until they found the affordable housing you helped provide.

Individuals you encounter in the course of your work are unlikely to volunteer information about private issues such as job loss, chronic health problems, poverty, family conflict, substance abuse and domestic violence. Yet, you are likely to uncover these realities.

Watch for these warning signs: no phone number, visible health problems or disabilities, lack of employment history, poor or uneven credit ratings, past experiences with the criminal justice system, and unstable or low incomes. Once people are homeless, their ability to find and stabilize housing plummets and the effort required to recreate security of housing tenure increases exponentially.

You can make a difference, not only by housing these individuals, but also by referring them to appropriate agencies and supports in your community. Provide whatever affordable housing units you can. Partner with other organizations to develop creative financing for affordable and supportive housing development. Find ways to provide tenants' rights education. Finally, as a housing provider or planner, your voice can have a powerful impact. Be an advocate for your clients 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. Growing awareness of the cause-and-effect relationship between homelessness and inadequate supplies of affordable housing has created networks which are coming together to shape an effective community response – from employment and education services, to private businesses and landlords, to housing, service and financial groups, to government and policy people, to city planners.

If such a group does not exist in your community, consider taking the lead to form your own network. Talk to other affordable housing and services providers, as well as sympathetic private developers. Recruit teachers, bankers, employers and others in your community to extend homelessness awareness. Your community's legal aid, community health and social service agencies are valuable resources to know and to refer those you house. Take steps today so you 'll know who to call when you need solutions for your tenants or members.

Organize to research, create and support existing homelessness prevention strategies. Ensure that strategies tried in your community and the lessons learned are shared widely to help everyone act together to prevent homelessness. Sometimes your collective work will lead to innovative community practices, like those available on the Raising the Roof website at [www.raisingtheroof.org](http://www.raisingtheroof.org). (You'll find lots of ideas here, many specific to the housing sector, for reference and inspiration.)

Housing providers know the human costs of rising homelessness firsthand. More than just filling units with suitable tenants or providing a modest housing subsidy, it is about the well-being of our communities. That's why more and more housing providers are speaking out about the costs of homelessness to communities. Write, discuss the issue and make your voice heard. Tell your elected officials what you see and what you want done about it. Become an advocate for the homeless and those at risk.

Support the development, funding and protection of affordable housing in your community. Work with unlikely allies to strengthen your voice and homelessness prevention initiatives. Your commitment lends credibility to the arguments for adequate income and social supports, and for policies and programs to increase the supply of affordable housing. Actively support programs and initiatives in other sectors aimed at preventing the root causes of homelessness – locally, provincially and federally.

you know homelessness has a major impact on your community  
make sure others know, too

