



A Roadmap for Youth Homelessness Data Infrastructure



Policy Wise
for Children & Families

Canada



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PolicyWise for Children & Families acknowledges the lands on which our team gathers and resides are Treaty Six Territory, Treaty Seven Territory, Treaty Eight Territory, and the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. Since time immemorial, these lands have been home to the nêhiyaw (Cree), Dene, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk). We also acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Métis Nation of Alberta's North Saskatchewan River Territory, Battle River Territory, Peace River Territory, and Lower Athabasca River Territory.

We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and are committed to learning and working towards reconciliation.

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Executive Summary

PolicyWise for Children & Families, in partnership with the University of Lethbridge, co-created a roadmap for information to support the prevention of youth homelessness in Canada. Our project is 'making the shift' from focusing on crisis-based homelessness supports towards an approach that works to prevent homelessness.

We spoke with over 130 individuals throughout the project, including:

- Youth with lived experience of homelessness
- Indigenous communities
- Community service providers
- Researchers
- Government workers

The roadmap reflects three years of community engagement. We do not intend for it to be rigid, nor can it represent all the interest holders impacted by youth homelessness. We know more engagement is needed to continue exploring this complex and evolving landscape.

The roadmap includes four recommendations:

- 1. Build quality community engagement**
- 2. Support better data collection and use**
- 3. Support collaboration around prevention**
- 4. Build up data for youth homelessness prevention**



Some immediate steps we recommend are:

- **Beginning with ongoing data-related initiatives.** Share the findings from Making the Shift and other projects about youth homelessness prevention and effective data use. Also, relationships such as prevention community connection tables should be nurtured, where communities come together to work on prevention with researchers' support.
- **Next, build new information on a smaller scale.** Start with a single community or province to:
 - Fund and support community-based research and evaluation.
 - Build better data about homelessness prevention, such as information on early prevention, collaborative efforts with other organizations and youth shelters, and using linked administrative data.
 - Creating standards for data collection and use.

Moving forward, a cooperative, cross-sectoral, and cross-interest-holder governance team is needed. This team should have representation across interest holders, including equity-focused partners, youth, and elders.



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Introduction

This report is a summary of the full roadmap and includes:

- A brief background
- Our methods
- The principles of how the work should be done
- Our recommendations on how to move forward

You can find the full roadmap report on [our project web page](#) for more details about the recommendations, their rationale, and examples of how they could look in practice. This web page also has briefs that introduce some immediate steps interest holders can take, along with other supplementary pieces such as webinars.

This project is funded by and draws on learning from Making the Shift: Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab. Making the Shift collaborates with researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and advocates to conduct, fund, and apply innovative research across Canada to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Background

Forty percent of Canadian youth who are homeless first experienced it before age 16.¹ Currently, youth homelessness services are mainly focused on crisis-based supports to help those experiencing homelessness. Our project focuses on developing Canadian information that helps prevent youth homelessness.^{1,2}

40% of Canadian youth who are homeless first experienced it before age 16.¹

Often, support systems for youth who are homeless do not meet their needs. If a youth ends up in the system, despite their great resilience, they face growing risks that can put them on a path of long-term homelessness.^{1,3-5} Youth needs are often complex, crossing systems and supports. Youth may experience poverty, child welfare interventions, justice involvement, mental health needs, and educational struggles before they end up homeless.^{1,3,6} Youth may also face discrimination based on their identity, with overrepresentation of Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, and newcomer youth in homelessness in Canada.^{6,7}

Currently, there are many promising efforts to improve data about homelessness. Beyond the research projects funded by [Making the Shift](#), some other examples include:

- [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario](#)
- [Edmonton's Youth Agency Collaboration](#)
- [Homeless Individuals and Families Information System](#) improvements
- [British Columbia's Data Innovation Program](#)
- [Upstream Canada](#)



These initiatives coordinate service delivery through shared data systems, use standardized measures, and link data from different sources. These new approaches can better inform youth homelessness prevention.

The roadmap seeks to create information that brings light to effective prevention strategies through research and evaluation. It also informs different types of prevention, such as:

- 1. Primary prevention, before youth are homeless*
- 2. Secondary prevention, before youth become homeless long-term*
- 3. Tertiary prevention, helping youth exit long-term homelessness*

The roadmap addresses critical gaps in homelessness and youth homelessness prevention data. Current data:

- Misses counting youth that are homeless
- Does not identify youth for homelessness prevention
- Lacks guidance about the ethical use of data and meaningfully engaging youth

Methods

Our methods included learning from the literature, drawing insights from current data, and engaging with interest holders in youth homelessness to co-create the roadmap. We spoke with over 130 individuals throughout the project. Our processes drew on the experience of various interest holders in the youth homelessness sector, such as:

- Youth with lived experience of homelessness
- Indigenous communities
- Community service providers
- Researchers
- Government workers

On the next page in Figure 1, we summarized our methods and deliverables.





Figure 1. Visual of the process of creating our Roadmap for Youth Homelessness Data Infrastructure



Principles

We offer seven principles that represent how interest holders want to work in the future, current Canadian data culture, and promising data practices.

“ ***We want to make sure the way we collect information is also resonating with our young people.*** ”

- Community service provider

1. Community-centred. We need to consider the views and needs of everyone involved, including:

- Youth with lived experience
- Indigenous communities
- Service providers
- Researchers
- Decision makers



“ *I truly believe there needs to be more collaboration and sharing.*

- Community service provider

2. Collaborative. Collaboration is necessary to address the complex and multi-system nature of youth homelessness prevention. Some examples of collaboration include:

- Partnerships between service providers
- Coordination across systems to meet youth needs
- Connections between researchers and service providers

3. Supported. There is a need for increased funding and support structures to improve data, while addressing rising organizational costs and staff turnover. Some examples include:

- Training staff on data collection
- Funding quality research and accurate homelessness counts across Canada
- Supporting community engagement
- Providing enough resources to build enough housing for those in need

4. Inclusive. Addressing the diverse needs of youth in data collection is necessary. For example, it is necessary to recognize the unique experiences among different subgroups such as Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, newcomers, and Black youth. Including broader definitions of youth homelessness would also help to build connections between systems and sectors serving different needs.



“ Because you need a shelter, right, you’re desperate to get a shelter. So, if you need the service, you can’t say no.

- Youth

5. Ethical. Prioritizing ethical data collection is essential, focusing on putting youth needs first and actively preventing harm. Ethical data collection impacts service delivery, as building trust with youth is crucial for them to feel safe providing data. Informed consent should detail how service providers will use the data they collect in accessible language and remove barriers to saying no.

6. Feasible. The roadmap should begin with simple, impactful changes. These changes need to work within the capacity of interest holders such as youth, service providers, and Indigenous communities. They also should build on existing policies and initiatives.

7. Sustainable. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen data for preventing youth homelessness. The roadmap identifies some projects with existing, sustained funding from which to build. It is important to preserve the connections established in the Making the Shift project.

“ Let’s drop the pilots. Not everything needs to be innovative... Let’s just focus on what we know is working and how to pull that data in a reliable way that will give us like longitudinal information to inform really good decision making.

- Researcher





Recommendations

The roadmap reflects three years of community engagement about data that informs youth homelessness prevention. It presents interest holders' ideas for improving this data, provides examples from across Canada and the world, and offers a path forward. The roadmap is not intended to be rigid, nor is it possible to represent all the interest holders affected by youth homelessness.

As we journey forward in this complex and evolving landscape, more engagement is needed. Specific actions for each recommendation are listed in Appendix B and are linked through the titles of each section.

The roadmap includes four recommendations. The first three recommendations support how the work is done, as valuable information is built on strong practices, relationships, and connections. The final recommendation addresses the data needed for prevention.



1. Build quality community engagement

Community engagement helps make data meaningful by connecting how it is collected, used, and interpreted with the realities of communities.

To build quality community engagement, we need to:

- Provide training on quality community engagement
- Facilitate and motivate community engagement around data

Provide training on quality community engagement

Interest holders want to conduct high-quality community engagement but wish they had more guidance. Training is needed for engaging the youth sector specifically, with consideration given to sub-populations like Indigenous communities. Training should address youth prevention topics, such as how to engage schools. *See the recommended activities on [page 22](#).*

Facilitate and motivate community engagement around data

Building from existing connections for future work is important, like those developed by Making the Shift. For those establishing connections, community service providers can help contact youth with lived experience. Some relationships can be more challenging to pass on, such as Indigenous community connections that need to be established over time while honouring reciprocity. Funders need to ask for more community engagement, fund it, and remove barriers to using this funding. *See the recommended activities on [page 23](#).*



2. Support better data collection and use

Reliable data enhances prevention efforts, and sharing findings boosts their impact. Systematic problems or omissions with data can mislead and reinforce issues stigmatized populations face. High-quality data collection and better knowledge use can reduce the burden on interest holders, who may be duplicating their efforts.

To support better data collection and use, we need to:

- Provide training on youth data collection and use
- Improve data collection by ethically collecting data from youth and making it more human-centred
- Increase the use of findings from data

Provide training on youth data collection and use

Training is needed for staff and researchers to support robust data collection. This is particularly important for data collection around sensitive topics for youth. This training needs to be supported over time to address staff turnover and culture change. *See the recommended activities on [page 24](#).*



Improve data collection

Improving data collection involves two actions:

1. Ethically collect data from youth

Youth need access to services independent from consenting to data collection. Provide more nuanced informed consent, or different types of informed consent depending on the situation, allowing youth to decide what is shared and with who. *See the recommended activities on page 24.*

2. Make data collection more human-centred

A human-centred approach is where the people involved in data collection and use are the focus. This approach aligns data with people's realities and needs to be developed through community engagement. For example, more engagement is necessary with Indigenous communities to collect data that addresses their needs and perspectives.

Community providers and youth suggested collecting minimal data early on while building trust and progressing to more questions on a later visit. To streamline data collection, providers need to decide which questions they should collect to support collaboration and sector-wide analyses. *See the recommended activities on page 25.*

Increase the use of findings from data

Serving the holistic needs of youth requires collaboration. Sharing findings more widely, sooner, and with engaged communities is a way to enhance the impact of the data and research used to inform the prevention of youth homelessness. Training on how to effectively share is needed, drawing from strong examples involving prevention. *See the recommended activities on page 25.*



3. Support collaboration around prevention

Serving the holistic needs of youth requires collaboration. We can build off examples of existing partnerships. However, most interest holders expressed the need for further collaboration across organizations and sectors to better serve youths' holistic needs and prevent youth homelessness.

To support collaboration around prevention, we need to:

- Facilitate collaboration around youth homelessness prevention
- Use data to support collaboration

Facilitate collaboration around youth homelessness prevention

Collaboration exists across organizations serving youth experiencing homelessness. However, more collaboration is required to prevent youth homelessness. More collaboration is also needed with sectors that do not directly address homelessness, such as health, corrections, and K-12 education. Training on collaboration for prevention, relationship building, and incentives for working together can increase how much it is done. *See the recommended activities on [page 26](#).*

Use data to support collaboration

Using data to support collaboration involves two parts:

1. Building processes for ethical data sharing

We need to build ethical processes that empower youth with the ownership of their data and choice of how it is used. The youth we engaged often supported sharing data if they were informed of its use and allowed true consent. *See the recommended activities on [page 27](#).*

2. Sharing data to support collaboration

Data sharing is a tool that can increase collaboration and is built on strong relationships and governance. We need to learn from previous examples of data sharing. Various types of data sharing facilitate collaboration and service access for youth homelessness prevention. For example, warm referrals, sharing on service availability, and sharing data to direct services. *See the recommended activities on [page 28](#).*

4. Build up data for youth homelessness prevention

Data is an essential tool that can inform the prevention of youth homelessness. By strategically improving data and collecting new data, we can better target prevention efforts aimed at youth and understand how well they are working.

To support building up data for youth homelessness prevention, we need to:

- Support learning on youth homelessness prevention
- Detect youth homelessness risk to inform early prevention
- Improve homelessness and housing-related data
- Use administrative data to inform homelessness prevention

Support learning on youth homelessness prevention

We need to learn more about what works to prevent youth homelessness. This involves building on insights from existing projects like Making the Shift and ongoing research and evaluation. We can also learn how to do better research and evaluation from ongoing work. Future work can progress on a smaller scale but benefits from larger funding, like Making the Shift. *See the recommended activities on [page 29](#).*

Detect youth homelessness risk early and use it for prevention

Early risk detection can improve the chances of preventing homelessness before youth are stuck in the homelessness system. Data around known transition points, such as youth moving from child welfare supports to the street, are needed to inform efforts to reduce transitions into homelessness. More earlier risk data is needed, such as data from the child welfare system, K-12 education, mental health services, and integrated youth services, to address youth homelessness before a crisis period. Policies and programs aimed at supporting identified youth are crucial. *See the recommended activities on [page 30](#).*



Improve homelessness and housing-related data

Improving homelessness and housing-related data involves three parts:

1. Strengthen homeless shelter and housing data

Better and more timely homeless shelter and housing data is needed to improve the counts of youth using these services. They allow long-term analyses to better understand chronic homelessness. This data can also be used for system-wide analyses. Data on child-youth shelter usage for those under 18 years old needs to be reported in counts and used for shelter prevention strategies. Common questions around prevention need to be co-developed. *See the recommended activities on [page 31](#).*

2. Strengthen homelessness counts

We need to improve Point-in-Time counts as a tool used to monitor goals to reduce homelessness. For example, we need to reduce the time to report counts, co-design count questions, improve count coverage, and increase count frequency. It may take more time to see shifts in youth homelessness trends in counts, as younger youth data will be more incomplete, meaning we need to rely on adult homelessness patterns to see change. *See the recommended activities on [page 32](#).*

Point-in-Time counts are the estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a specific night in a defined geographical area.⁸

3. Develop other housing-related data

Better eviction, health care, and other housing data are needed to help direct prevention supports. This data supplements Point-in-Time counts. As better data is collected, it should be used for various analyses to inform systems of change. *See the recommended activities on [page 33](#).*



Use administrative data to inform homelessness prevention

Added consideration was given to administrative data as a priority topic for this project.

Using administrative data to inform homelessness prevention has three interrelated areas:

1. Building up administrative data

Building up administrative data at the organization level and across organizations in a sector includes two steps:

- *Improve organization-level administrative data*

Administrative data on patterns within youth-serving organizations should be used to inform supports aimed at preventing youth homelessness. Training is needed to increase the use of this data. Also, questions need to be co-designed between organizations and funders to improve their impact. ***See the recommended activities on page 33.***

- *Improve administrative data across organizations in a sector*

Cross-organization data can drive systems change by highlighting areas to prevent youth homelessness. We need to use cross-organization data more to inform prevention, co-design more impactful common questions on prevention, and support data collection improvement. Change may be more feasible by building from the community to the provincial level and then to the federal one. ***See the recommended activities on page 34.***

Administrative data is collected by organizations for their operations and reporting. This data may be demographics, characteristics, and other information.

Youth homelessness community service providers and other sectors, such as K-12 education, collect administrative data regularly.

Data across sectors can be linked together using identifiers, such as names and dates of birth, to understand trajectories into homelessness and what factors may be addressed to prevent homelessness.

2. Using linked administrative data

Administrative data linked across sectors helps look at youth service-use patterns that predict homelessness. We suggest two steps:

- *Supporting the use of existing linked administrative data*

Researchers can use linked data to analyze how individuals using one system were involved in other systems. This reveals service use trajectories of youth facing homelessness and informs systems-level solutions for prevention. We need to facilitate using existing linked data, share who is in the data, and engage with communities involved in the data. ***See the recommended activities on [page 35](#).***

- *Increasing linked administrative data across Canada*

We need to link data from more sectors to provide a broader view of youth needs that can be supported with prevention. Analysis across jurisdictions provides comparative and larger-scale evidence on how to engage in systems change. We need to link more data around prevention, increase the number of Canadian data centres with cross-system data, and support the use of newly linked data. ***See the recommended activities on [page 36](#).***

3. Linking organization data to administrative data

We can link organizational data to relevant administrative data to show how prevention services impact individuals. This helps demonstrate services and support continued learning to improve services. We suggest training on this approach, helping connect those doing it, and working with data centres to support this type of work. ***See the recommended activities on [page 37](#).***



The background of the page is a photograph of a city street. In the foreground, there is a tram track with a metal rail. To the right, a dark car is partially visible. In the background, a street lamp with a blue globe is mounted on a curved pole. The sky is clear and blue. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

The Way Forward

Because the work needed to support the prevention of youth homelessness in Canada is complex, it needs robust and coordinated planning and oversight. It requires a cooperative, cross-sectoral, and cross-interest-holder governance team.

Governance needs representation across interest holders, including equity-focused partners, youth, and elders. The governance should connect to leaders of related work in Canada, such as:

- [Making the Shift](#)
- [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#)
- [A Way Home Canada](#)
- [Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada](#)
- [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#)
- [Health Research Data Network](#)
- [Statistics Canada](#)

Once a governance team has been created, funded, and staffed, the short-term actions outlined in Figure 2 can be done to use information to support youth homelessness prevention.

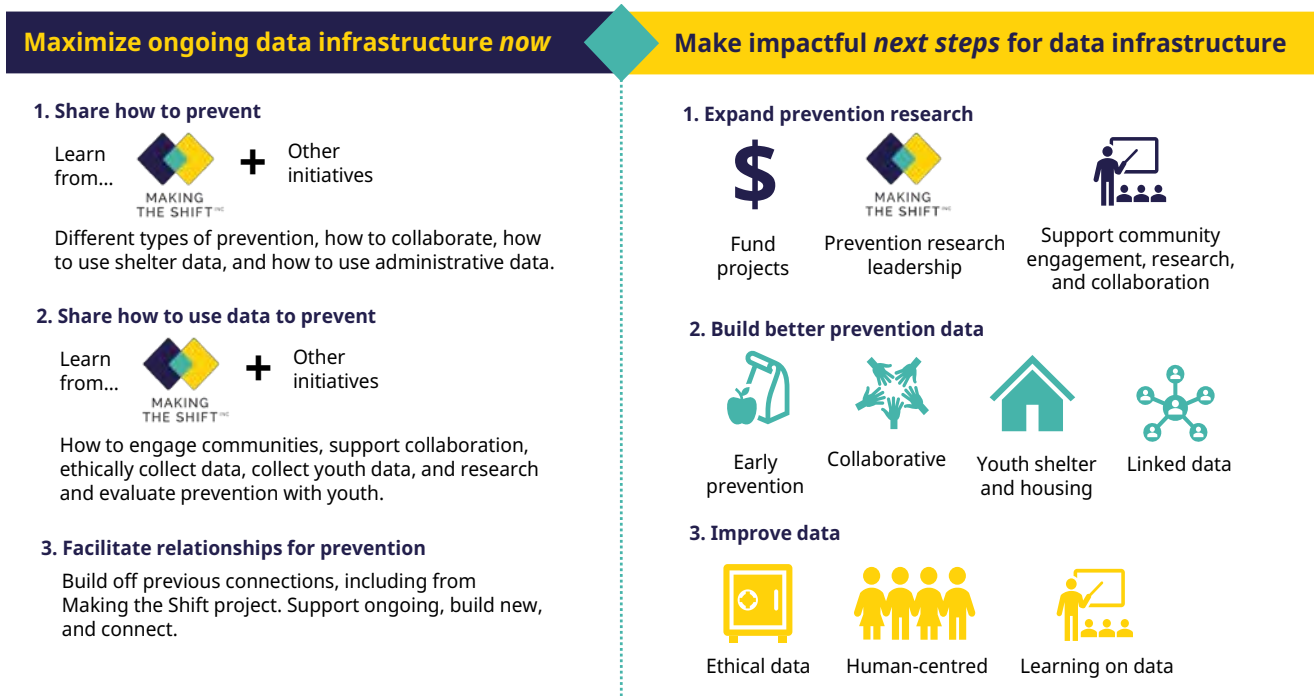


Figure 2. Visual of recommended immediate and next steps.

As efforts progress, further interest holder engagement is necessary to move forward.

- **Begin with ongoing data-related initiatives.** Share the insights from Making the Shift and other projects about youth homelessness prevention, train on effective data use, and facilitate relationships. For example, prevention community connection tables can be formed to connect communities around prevention with researcher support.
- **Next, build new information on a smaller scale, starting with a single community or province.** This includes funding and supporting community-based research and evaluation, building better prevention data, and creating data collection and use standards.

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Appendix A: Key Terms

The following key terms used in this report are defined below.

Term	Definition	Links
Duty-to-Assist	A legislated obligation requiring reasonable effort to ensure the human right to safe and adequate housing.	https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/trainings/duty-to-assist/
Health Research Data Network Canada (HRDN)	A pan-Canadian network of member organizations that either hold linkable health and health-related data for entire populations and/or have mandates and roles relating directly to access or use of those data.	https://www.hdrn.ca/en/
Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)	An information system developed by the Government of Canada to support the day-to-day operational activities of Canadian homeless service providers.	https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/hifis-sisa/index-eng.html
Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities Canada	This organization, formerly known as Infrastructure Canada, builds resilient and inclusive communities for Canadians by providing funding and advice for locally designed and delivered housing and homelessness initiatives as well as new and upgraded infrastructure.	https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/index-eng.html

Term	Definition	Links
Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)	ICES leads cutting-edge studies that evaluate health care delivery and outcomes. ICES researchers access a vast and secure array of Ontario’s health-related data, including population-based health surveys, anonymous patient records, and clinical and administrative databases.	https://www.ices.on.ca/
OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession)	The First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession, more commonly known as OCAP, assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes and own and control the use of this information.	https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/
Point-in-Time counts	Estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a specific night in a defined geographical area.	https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/resources-ressources/point-in-time-denombrement-ponctuel-eng.html
Youth Agency Collaboration	This organization collaborates around youth supports in Edmonton, Alberta.	https://yess.org/youthagencycollaboration/
Youth Wellness Hubs and Integrative Youth Hubs	These organizations exist across Canada. They collaborate to serve youth needs, including well-being and homelessness, and coordinate across various local partners.	https://youthhubs.ca/ and https://resourcesforpractice.policywise.com/resource?id=79



Appendix B: Recommended Actions Explained

1. Build quality community engagement

Provide training on quality community engagement

Activity 1 - Build training materials on community engagement

Create materials to train for quality community engagement around youth prevention data and research and evaluation.

Activity 2 - Train on community engagement

Share training widely. Offer recorded webinars on different types of community engagement. Update these trainings and offer them over time to connect with more interest holders and share methods as they improve.

Activity 3 - Facilitate connections to community engagement experts

Facilitate mentorship opportunities for researchers to actively work with experts to develop their community engagement abilities.

Examples and opportunities

- An example of training is McMaster University's [Family Engagement in Research](#) course.
- [Making the Shift](#) involved training and sharing on community engagement methods. Continuing this training can carry forward the legacy of the initiative.

Facilitate and motivate community engagement around data

Activity 1 - Facilitate relationships for community

Facilitate connections to established relationships with community interest holder groups such as youth with lived experience, different types of community service providers, and Indigenous communities. Build youth homelessness prevention tables to connect researchers to the communities to engage.

Activity 2 - Call for community engagement

Work with funders to put in calls for community engagement in funding around research and data. Provide clear guidance on how engagement should be done within calls. Provide more funding for engagement.

Activity 3 - Remove barriers to community engagement

Work to remove barriers to how funding can be used to pay community members who are being engaged. Work with universities to change how academics are evaluated on community engagement.

Examples and opportunities

- [Making the Shift](#) and its partnering groups, the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#) and [A Way Home Canada](#), have established many connections that can facilitate future community engagement.
- [Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research](#) facilitates connections with persons with lived experience for research on health topics.

2. Support better data collection and use

Provide training on youth data collection and use

Activity 1 - Train on data collection

Train on how to collect quality data, including topics such as youth in general, youth with mental health needs, youth with trauma, and youth with different backgrounds, such as gender identity and mental health status. Training should make the value of data collection clear.

Activity 2 - Train on research and evaluation

Train community service providers and academic researchers on youth-focused research and evaluation. Train on how to share findings for impact, such as faster sharing when working with community service providers.

Activity 3 - Provide funding to support regular training

Due to limited schedules and high staff turnover, funding is needed to provide regular training over time.

Examples and opportunities

- [Making the Shift](#) has allowed researchers to develop skills in youth prevention research, which can inform future data collection and research.
- The Australian Government gathers monthly data from over 1,700 homeless service agencies through the [Specialist Homelessness Services Collection](#). It offers training to help organizations collect data.

Improve data collection

1. Ethically collect data from youth

Activity 1 - Improve informed consent

Make the language and length of informed consent processes accessible to youth who are in a vulnerable state. Make rights, risks, and data use clear.

Activity 2 - Protect youth from harm

Split consent for data collection from service delivery.

Activity 3 - Consider different types of consent

The choice to provide data was proposed for more vulnerable situations for youth. Data collection from everyone, with the ability to pull out, was proposed for risk detection.

Examples and opportunities

- Multiple organizations discussed designing shorter data collection and consent processes for the first use of services.
- [Upstream Canada](#), using school-based interventions for homelessness prevention, mentioned the importance of data collection from everyone to detect risk.

2. Make data collection more human-centred

Activity 1 - Co-create youth data that informs prevention

Engage with youth to collect prevention data on how they want to be represented. Collect data that sees youth more holistically, such as through qualitative data. Take a strengths-based approach.

Activity 2 - Shorten data collection

Limit questions to those directed at services or required for reporting. Work with funders to reduce redundancy in questions. Use progressive questions, starting with minimal data on first visits and asking more as trust is built, and separate service data from research data.

Activity 3 - Improve data collection across organizations

Work together to determine the most impactful common questions for prevention. Plan how to use common questions in collaboration.

Examples and opportunities

- [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario](#) discussed engaging with youth on their data systems to meet their needs.
- Edmonton's [Youth Agency Collaboration](#) engaged with youth to develop more youth-centred, holistic indicators.

Increase the use of findings from data

Activity 1 - Train on the effective sharing of findings

Provide leading examples of how the timely sharing of findings led to change, such as through dashboards. Build guidance on sharing in community partnerships. Sharing may need to be earlier to support service delivery, well before lengthy academic publication processes.

Activity 2 - Work to increase the impact of findings

Facilitate wider sharing of findings from prevention efforts, such as from the Making the Shift projects. Highlight connections to how findings inform policy. Share the findings with the communities and youth they relate to. Fund efforts to share the findings.

Examples and opportunities

- Various communities discussed using dashboards to show the outcomes of their efforts to support decision making.
- [Making the Shift](#) has resulted in many findings that could be shared further. Project learnings on how to share findings can be documented and benefit others.

3. Support collaboration around prevention

Facilitate collaboration around youth homelessness prevention

Activity 1 - Train on how to collaborate for youth homelessness prevention

Use the findings from successful collaboration projects for youth homelessness prevention to develop training. Train on privacy rules for collaboration, as it is a commonly perceived barrier.

Activity 2 - Facilitate relationships between organizations and cross-sector

Actively facilitate connections between organizations to build collaborations and reduce time building relationships.

Activity 3 - Facilitate collaboration tables around prevention

More youth homelessness prevention tables are needed. Researchers can support tables while prioritizing community needs.

Activity 4 - Incentivize collaboration

Funders should call for more collaboration to prevent youth homelessness and provide guidance for how it should happen.

Examples and opportunities

- Youth Wellness Hubs and Integrative Youth Hubs across Canada collaborate to serve youth needs, including well-being and homelessness, while also coordinating with various local partners. These efforts are currently being expanded.
- [Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada](#) is actively promoting collaboration through coordinated access and collaboration requirements in recent funding calls.

Use data to support collaboration

1. Building processes for ethical data sharing

Activity 1 - Co-create strong, informed consent processes on data sharing

Inform youth on how data will be used and shared, and provide them with a choice on how they share. Create accessible consent forms and share processes among organizations with youth input.

Activity 2 - Create processes to protect youth from harm in data sharing

Create processes to maximize youth benefits while minimizing harm. Treat youth data as dynamic, avoiding lasting documentation of one-time behaviours to prevent discrimination. Determine appropriate timelines for data deletion when it no longer serves the youth and offer alternative pathways to service access when youth don't want to share.

Examples and opportunities

- [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario](#) co-developed processes around data sharing with youth.
- Some [Making the Shift](#) projects used data to coordinate services and often involved youth engagement in their design. We can learn from these projects.

2. Sharing data to support collaboration

Activity 1 - Support learning about data sharing

As successful examples of data sharing to support youth homelessness prevention are identified, share the findings from these initiatives. Future works need effective governance.

Activity 2 - Share simple data to support referrals

Create and share processes for organizations to share simple data for warm hand-offs and referrals for youth.

Activity 3 - Share service availability data

Create service availability maps for youth to address their needs. Service availability data should be up-to-date and specific.

Activity 4 - Share youth data to coordinate services

Information can be shared between organizations, such as coordinating data fields or sharing case notes. More sharing around youth homelessness prevention is needed, such as in schools or child welfare programs.

Examples and opportunities

- [Upstream Canada](#) worked with schools to identify youth at risk for homelessness and use this to direct services.
- The [Community Information Exchange](#) model was created in San Diego to support data sharing in a community. This model is being adapted in Canada.
- [Reaching Home](#) emergency shelters have access to [HIFIS](#) and are mandated to provide coordinated access to housing supports.

4. Build up data for youth homelessness prevention

Support learning on youth homelessness prevention

Activity 1 - Learn from recent and ongoing youth homelessness research and evaluation

Results from Making the Shift and other prevention projects should be shared widely. A learning community can be used to continue sharing findings and support prevention efforts.

Activity 2 - Train researchers on youth homelessness prevention research and evaluation

Inform the next generation of researchers and evaluators about how to do impactful youth homelessness prevention research and evaluation, such as working with youth navigating trauma and learning from youth lived experience.

Activity 3 - Fund future research and evaluation on youth homelessness prevention

Continue supporting funding efforts by fostering connections for prevention focused funding opportunities. Smaller funding calls are a start, but larger funding opportunities, like Making the Shift, offer a greater impact.

Examples and opportunities

- [Making the Shift](#) projects are a starting point for future research and evaluation as they have experience using research methods for youth homelessness prevention. [The National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness](#) is a hub for these resources.
- Health Research Data Network Canada has a training series for future researchers on their research methods, including on [national administrative data analysis](#).

Detect youth homelessness risk early and use it for prevention

Activity 1 - Improve data around transition points into homelessness

Collect better data and continue to research topics that identify risky transitions. Pair data with policy and program changes that support prevention. For example, providing automatic income supports for housing to children aging out of the child welfare system.

Activity 2 - Build data to detect youth homelessness risk early

Build up data in various sectors to inform early prevention before youth become homeless, such as K-12 education, child welfare, or child mental health supports, including integrated youth hubs. Starting small, for example, with a single school or district, may be more accessible than a larger-scale initiative, such as across schools in a province. Pair data with policies and programs that support prevention.

Activity 3 - Support efforts around 'Youth Duty-to-Assist' to enhance accountability

To strengthen these efforts, implementing a 'Youth Duty-to-Assist' policy or mandating support for identified youth represents a potentially transformative approach.

Examples and opportunities

- British Columbia's provision of youth housing income supports for youth being identified as aging out of child welfare programs.
- [Upstream Canada](#) and [Reconnect](#) are working with some schools in Canada to detect homelessness and its risks early, offering supports to youth identified as being at risk.

Improve homelessness and housing-related data

1. Strengthen homeless shelter and housing data

Activity 1 - Co-develop common questions

Engage with shelters and researchers to develop common questions to collect across organizations to inform prevention. Create clear pathways for community engagement to refine these questions and their framing.

Activity 2 - Improve emergency shelter and housing data collection

Improve informed consent processes to ensure service access regardless of data use consent. Provide regular training to enhance staff skills in collecting inclusive, high-quality data while streamlining questions to reduce the burden on both staff and youth.

Activity 3 - Use this data to support later prevention efforts

Identify youth new to homelessness and those who are chronically homeless. Perform analyses to understand youth at risk for chronic homelessness. This may direct future data collection and supports.

Activity 4 - Gather and report emergency shelter and housing data more regularly

Build on the Government of Canada's initiative to implement monthly national reporting of high-quality data by expanding it to all funded shelters. Extend beyond Reaching Home communities, including youth shelters and family violence shelters. Share the findings promptly and use the data to guide youth homelessness prevention planning.

Activity 5 - Collect data from child-youth shelters serving those under 18

Increase national reporting of child-youth shelter data. Privacy measures may be necessary to make interest holders comfortable sharing and working with this data.

Examples and opportunities

- The [Australian Government supports the monthly data collection from over 1,700 homelessness service agencies](#). The data quality is comparable to health care system data, which is the gold standard for data.
- The Government of Canada is working towards the monthly reporting of [Reaching Home](#) data and improving data quality. This effort is voluntary and currently involves over 50% of the communities. Reaching Home asks for common questions across the country in emergency shelters receiving their funding.

2. Strengthen homelessness counts

Activity 1 - Decrease the time to report Point-in-Time counts

Earlier counts based on communities and provinces that report first should be provided as soon as possible. Use counts to inform policies and programs. Sharing Point-in-Time data for research can increase its impact.

Activity 2 - Co-design count questions to inform change

Actively use Point-in-Time questions to inform prevention policy and programs. Engage with communities to design questions aimed at prevention. Report surveys earlier to hasten possible change.

Activity 3 - Improve the coverage of counts

Count as many homeless individuals as possible. Provide sufficient funding to do this well. Make efforts to survey children and youth in Point-in-Time counts to understand trends.

Activity 4 - Increase the frequency of counts

Use more frequent Point-in-Time counts to inform policy. Other jurisdictions use a yearly Point-in-Time count. Some jurisdictions report on easier-to-access homelessness service-use data more frequently to inform policy.

Examples and opportunities

- The U.S. does yearly Point-in-Time counts. This provided evidence that policy changes around U.S. supports for veterans decreased homelessness.
- London, UK, uses the [Combined Homelessness and Information Network](#) to count all individuals reached by street outreach. Better funding led to an apparent increase in homeless individuals, as expanded outreach activities improved the detection of rough sleeping.

3. Develop other housing-related data

Activity 1 - Improve evictions data

Connect supports to data around individuals facing evictions. Improve this data and use it for research to support future program and policy design.

Activity 2 - Improve health care homelessness data

Make standards for housing-related questions in health care visits, including tailored questions on hidden homelessness for youth. Connect youth to supports and avoid discharging individuals to the streets. Use health care data on homelessness for analyses, which will be more informative as it becomes a standard question.

Activity 3 - Improve other housing-related data

Improve other housing-related data that can inform homelessness prevention.

Examples and opportunities

- Evictions data is being used in Wales to support local authority providers as they work to support legislation around the [Duty-to-Assist](#), which requires reasonable efforts to assist those at risk for homelessness.
- PolicyWise used the health care code for homelessness to investigate youth identified as homeless, [using multi-system linked data](#).

Use administrative data to inform homelessness prevention

1. Building up administrative data

a. Improve organization-level administrative data

Activity 1 - Train organizations to use their administrative data

Provide training on how to use organization data to inform prevention programs, such as using dashboards or reports, and provide examples. Training is necessary across different sectors that support youth, such as education, child welfare, and homeless shelters.

Activity 2 - Design reporting questions to be useful to organizations

Organizations and funders should collaborate on reporting questions that meet both funder-required reporting and organizational needs. Funders across a sector may seek common questions to support systems learning around prevention. Where possible, use standard reports and dashboards.

Examples and opportunities

- [Public dashboards in Toronto](#) are used in the shelter systems to understand system use and the types of clients served.
- One community-level entity used dashboards to highlight areas for data collection improvement, facilitating follow-up discussions. They also shared findings early to motivate staff to collect better data.

b. Improve administrative data across organizations in a sector

Activity 1 - Use cross-organization data to inform change

Report back on cross-organization findings to inform prevention. Create dashboards to look at patterns. Some patterns may need more processing time and require a written report with sufficient context to interpret. Use established software, such as HIFIS, to speed up this work. Share leading use cases around prevention to support improvements in other jurisdictions.

Activity 2 - Select relevant and impactful common questions

Co-develop common questions that inform youth homelessness prevention across organizations in a sector.

Activity 3 - Actively support improvements in data collection

Provide standards and training for data collection. Develop standards that align with organizations' practical needs by actively engaging with them. Use dashboards, data quality checks, and communities of practice to support improvements to data.

Examples and opportunities

- Provincial shelter data is used to understand inflows into homeless and client characteristics. The Government of Canada is building towards monthly data reporting across [Reaching Home](#)-funded emergency shelters and improvements in data quality.
- [In Australia, government-approved software provides customizable reports](#) for service providers that are accessible anytime to aid decision making. Regular reports are created and shared with homelessness service providers to support decision making.

2. Using linked administrative data

a. Supporting the use of existing linked administrative data

Activity 1 - Support the use of existing linked administrative data to inform youth prevention

Share information about available data that can inform prevention. Provide training, such as how to build context around data with communities. As projects advance, share metadata, data quality, derived data, and scripts to enable future use of data.

Activity 2 - Document who is in administrative data

Use metadata and perform analyses to understand who is covered and who is excluded from the data. Ensure that interpretations and resulting policy and program designs do not exclude those not covered by the data. Acknowledge data gaps to ensure they do not reinforce systematic exclusions of populations. Work to improve demographic data that supports this process.

Activity 3 - Support engagement with relevant communities to interpret data

Work with data custodians to ensure analyses match program design and data collection processes. Build up engagement processes for working with communities to interpret the linked data. Build up processes for data use from Indigenous communities, referring to established principles such as OCAP. Support connections with these communities in their province or territory. As part of relationships with data custodians, provide feedback on data quality and potential future indicators from your engagement that might inform program and policy design.

Examples and opportunities

- [British Columbia is a leader in providing homeless shelter data](#) linked to multiple systems such as schools, justice, child welfare, and social supports, while also seeking to link more systems data.
- [Manitoba has multiple social systems](#) linked to health data, and they may link to shelter data in the future.
- Other data centres developing this work are [New Brunswick with cross-system linked data](#), [ICES in Ontario](#), and [Prince Edward Island](#), which started health data linkage.
- Statistics Canada has started [linking some provincial emergency shelter data](#) to other systems data, such as tax data.

b. Increasing linked administrative data across Canada

Activity 1 - Support the use of new data

Advertise new data as it is linked to increase its use. Provide metadata support and training on how to use it. Provide training on cross-jurisdictional data analysis, such as federated data analysis. Share scripts to support future use of new data.

Activity 2 - Support linkage of more youth prevention relevant data

Work with data centres that can link cross-sector data, which identifies existing government program data that informs youth homelessness prevention. Youth shelter and early youth system data are priorities. When data is not available, identify gaps and advocate for the data. New data collection is difficult and takes many years to accumulate to be useful.

Activity 3 - Increase data centres with relevant linked data across Canada

Work to increase the number of data centres across Canada with homelessness and housing data. Support their development through using best practices from other leading centres across Canada. Partner with Health Research Data Network Canada (HRDN) in these efforts, messaging about the importance of linking social data to inform health outcomes. Work with Statistics Canada to increase linkage when capacity is lacking in a jurisdiction or when needing to link to federal data sources.

Example and opportunity

- [HRDN](#) is a group working to support cross-jurisdictional data access to health data. They offer training and support access to health and linked administrative data. For example, HRDN hosted a webinar series on various aspects of using administrative data, including federated data analysis to support cross-jurisdictional analysis.

3. Linking organization data to administrative data

Activity 1 - Train on organizing administrative data linkage

Training is needed on how to create data sharing agreements, access data, link data, and conduct the analyses. Share examples of successful efforts and how they were possible.

Activity 2 - Support connections to increase this work

As successful linkages develop, share these connections to create more linkage opportunities. If organizations do not have the capacity, support connections with researchers to do this work.

Activity 3 - Increase capacity to link community data with other sectors' data

Work with data centres and government organizations to increase opportunities for linking their administrative data to organizational data so programs can be evaluated. Strengthen data centres and organizations to scale up similar projects. Many universities and data centres in Canada have secure environments that can be used for this purpose. Dedicated funding can increase the number of organizations doing this work.

Examples and opportunities

- Provincial health care systems sometimes link health data to other data. For example, [PolicyWise for Children & Families](#) linked a community service provider's data to health care use data, showing how the program related to health care use outcomes.
- Many projects by [Making the Shift](#) and others have linked community data to other data to show the outcomes of programs.
- Statistics Canada can link individuals' data to other systems data.



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