



National Alliance to  
**End Rural and Remote  
Homelessness**

Alliance Nationale pour  
**Mettre Fin à L'itinérance  
Rurale et Éloignée**

# Rural & Remote Homelessness

A Call for Strategic Investments to End Homelessness in Rural and Remote Communities across Canada

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Prepared by:

National Alliance to End Rural and Remote Homelessness (NAERRH)

## **The National Alliance the End Rural and Remote Homelessness (NAERRH):**

The NAERRH is a peer-led network dedicated to preventing, reducing and ending homelessness in rural and remote communities through advocacy, research, training and peer learning. The NAERRH is an allied network of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

## **A STRATEGY FOR ENDING RURAL & REMOTE HOMELESSNESS**

Representing 31% of the population of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016), rural and remote communities (<30 thousand population) are essential parts of a prosperous, healthy and vibrant Canada. Across rural & remote Canada, local governments, businesses, and service organizations are serving millions of people, contributing significantly to Canada's GDP, and creating thriving communities across the country. However, reductions in public investments, the effects of climate change, evolving labour and manufacturing markets, housing affordability pressures, and the limited availability of social supports in rural and remote communities have created significant challenges that require renewed federal leadership and innovation. **One of these challenges is homelessness.**

Although there is clear and mounting evidence that homelessness is equal to or more prevalent in rural communities than urban centres (Morton et al, 2017), rural and remote homelessness remains a relatively hidden issue. The hidden nature of rural and remote homelessness is due to a lack of services and supports, including housing options and a lack of 24/7 emergency service. These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of anonymity when identifying as being homeless in small communities; leading to people being forced off the streets and into outdoor spaces such as parks, wooded areas, public washrooms and RVs. This causes many homeless people to rely on couch surfing as their only possible form of shelter.

We know from Federal Point in Time (PiT) counts, existing research, and the stories of front-line workers from across the country that many at-risk individuals migrate from surrounding rural and remote communities to urban centres in search of supports and services such as shelters (Gray et al, 2011; Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015). The result of this migration is greater isolation, detachment from natural supports, exposure to new risk factors, and overburdened services in urban centres. Ultimately, this leads to a more traumatic path for individuals affected by homelessness and a need for more expensive interventions later. At a community level, this pattern of migration strips rural and remote communities of future employees, business owners, and citizens.

Just as rural and remote homelessness is often hidden from public view, it is largely ignored in federal policy, funding and data structures. If we are to collectively deliver on the objectives of the National Housing Strategy and Reaching Home and build a Canada that works for all Canadians, investments in solutions that tackle rural and remote homelessness are essential.

# TARGETTED RECOMMENDATIONS TO END RURAL & REMOTE HOMELESSNESS

## RECOMMENDATION #1 | Increase annual funding to rural and remote communities through Reaching Home

During a particularly difficult time, we are grateful for the investments the federal government made in supporting homeless populations across Canada through the Reaching Home fund. While we see this investment as a good start, we have identified the ways in which the current funding model does not adequately meet the needs of homeless populations in rural and remote communities. Below, we have addressed key actions that would move forward the priority of ending homelessness for Canadians living in rural and remote communities.

### Key Actions:

**1) Increase funding under the Reaching Home Rural and Remote stream from \$11 to \$50 million annually.**

The current funding allocation under the Rural and Remote Reaching Home stream amounts to approximately 8% of the total allocation to the Designated Communities stream (this includes Quebec allocations). Due to the dramatic underfunding of this stream, Central Entities across Canada tasked with the responsibility to administer these funds do so in a competitive application process resulting in the majority of rural communities receiving no funds. Further, successful applicants receive short term contracts of 1-2 years making program sustainability a significant challenge. Proportional investments in rural and remote funding would enable all rural communities to build sustainable supports to address homelessness and meet the needs of individual residents in their own communities.

**2) Maintain additional funding allocated for COVID-19 response as a permanent funding source dedicated towards sustainable solutions for ending homelessness**

When COVID-19 becomes less of a direct threat, homeless populations will continue to feel the profound effects of this pandemic. As we move from short term emergency response to sustained efforts to build back better, we must prioritize the principles of Housing First and the infrastructure supports necessary to provide housing to all Canadians. We recommend doing this by maintaining the additional \$157 million allocated towards COVID-19 housing & homelessness support.

## RECOMMENDATION #2 | Create a Federal Data Strategy for Rural and Remote Communities that Includes a Federal Count of Homeless Populations

Each year in designated communities across Canada (primarily urban centres), the Federal Government conducts a federal Point in Time Count. Communities using this model rally

together to count the number of individuals identified as homeless. This PiT count affords the government a snapshot of the state and prevalence of homelessness. This process captures both increases and decreases in the rates of homelessness in communities, and provides integral information for all levels of government and thousands of community service agencies on how to best support these populations. While the Federal Count is not without its challenges, the value of collecting this data is reflected in conversations on a National level about the allocation of funds. If funding is allocated based on evidence of need then a federal data strategy for rural and remote communities is imperative.

In 2018, the province of Ontario launched a mandatory count for all municipalities. Two different models were offered as an option; the federal Point in Time (PiT) count and the Period Prevalence Count (PPC). The PPC developed by Dr. Carol Kauppi was designed specifically for small communities and years of research demonstrate its efficacy. Using this type of methodology combined with real time data collected through a By-Name List would provide us with a better understanding of the prevalence of homelessness in rural and remote communities, the migration of individuals from rural to urban centres, and the driving factors leading to increases or decreases in homelessness.

### **RECOMMENDATION #3 | Dedicate 30% of Capital funding for Housing to Rural and Remote Communities**

Front line services providers and housing advocates from across Canada, striving to support folks experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic were immensely relieved upon hearing about the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI) announced by the Federal Government in which one billion dollars was committed for affordable housing initiatives. In November 2020, the eligibility criteria and application process for RHI was announced. \$500 million was designated for urban centres, while rural and remote communities would have to compete with other urban centres for the remaining \$500 million in funding.

We recommend allocating 30% of existing and future capital funding to rural and remote communities with populations below 30 thousand. In order for rural and remote communities to meet the needs of their residents, build affordable housing, and ultimately end homelessness, they must be treated with the same concern and prioritization as their urban neighbours. This would also enable CMHC to meet their goal of providing affordable housing for all by 2030.

### **ENDORSEMENT: Commit to the creation and funding of the “For Indigenous, By Indigenous” Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy**

The National Alliance to End Rural and Remote Homelessness, its members and partner organizations, understand that Indigenous people are heavily overrepresented amongst those experiencing homelessness, and Indigenous Homelessness itself is a distinct experience

requiring distinct solutions, many of which must be implemented in rural and remote areas. Therefore, NAERRH supports our national partners at the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) and the CHRA Indigenous Caucus in their efforts to secure funding and support for the creation of a “For Indigenous by Indigenous” Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

We can no longer deny that rural and remote homelessness is just as important as urban homelessness. The global pandemic has quickly taught us that housing is health care and individuals and families are best protected when safely housed.

We believe that these three recommendations, specific to Rural and Remote Homelessness, would not only enable us to ensure safe housing for all, but it would also unlock tremendous opportunities and innovations that include:

- Leveraging the knowledge of rural and remote providers at a national scale
- Learning from the unique characteristics of homelessness in rural and remote communities
- Afford individuals the ‘Right to Housing’ in a community of their choice where they may remain connected to natural supports, community and the land
- Creating new types of housing solutions and service interventions for rural and remote communities
- Exploring opportunities for collaboration and coordination between on-reserve communities and adjacent rural and remote communities
- Preventing urban homelessness
- Reducing system strains on urban providers
- Exploring opportunities for collaboration and coordination between urban communities and surrounding rural and remote communities
- Strengthening rural and remote community labour markets
- Revitalizing rural and remote community housing markets

**Join us in the call for these recommendations and let’s end homelessness for all Canadians.**

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