

# Homelessness during COVID-19



## Supporting Indigenous wellness during COVID-19

This fact sheet is part of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's commitment to provide culturally-grounded and strength-based supports for First Nations people during COVID-19. These resources can provide guidance as our communities navigate the current global health crisis, while continuing to face existing health challenges, including substance use and mental health issues.

## How can we support communities and help homeless people stay safe during COVID-19?

Our strengths as Indigenous peoples is to remember our teachings and responsibility to extend to others a feeling of continued belonging. Our understanding of our responsibilities and connections to one another and how to treat one another comes from our teachings about our relationship with the earth, land, water, territories and ancestors. Organizations, community health workers and volunteers play an important role in helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 among those who experience homelessness.

### HOW TO SUPPORT THOSE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AND 'HIDDEN' HOMELESSNESS (COUCH SURFING)

- Those experiencing homelessness are at a high risk of negative health outcomes brought on by COVID-19, including death, because they often have limited access to public health care and often have pre-existing health conditions.
- The homeless must not be punished, instead provide them with safe housing alternatives to protect them from contracting COVID-19.
- Provide adequate emergency housing to allow them to self-isolate (i.e. have private space for eating, sleeping and washing).
- Mobilize appropriate housing such as vacant housing, apartments, hotels, student housing.
- Those experiencing homelessness should be prioritized for testing.
- Provide access to safe hygiene services, sanitation and food supply.
- Understand and support Indigenous women and children fleeing violence and in need of housing. However, shelters and other forms of communal housing also pose a higher risk of coronavirus transmission/contraction.

### HOW TO HELP SERVICE PROVIDERS MANAGE COVID-19 IN HOMELESS SHELTERS.

- Ensure Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) is available.
- Ensure that shelters follow appropriate physical distancing protocols for those accessing shelters. Separate space should be given for eating, washing and sleeping.
- Ensure that shelter users and staff have access to healthcare services

## Preventing homelessness during COVID-19

Be compassionate and understanding. Forcing individuals to be homeless by eviction will only increase the spread of COVID-19.

- A temporary suspension on eviction for non-payment of rent should be considered.
  - Consideration of unemployment due to state of emergency, responsibility of caring for family members with COVID-19, etc. is important.
- Tenants and landlords are encouraged to agree on rent relief or temporary amendments to the lease.
- Ensure that support and alternative housing is available for victims of domestic violence and abuse, who are not safe in their own home during the pandemic.
  - Indigenous women are at a higher risk of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic due to self-isolation and the need to stay home. Job loss due to the virus may increase the risk of abuse.
- Where possible provide funding (bus/train/plane fare) for individuals to return to their communities.
- Provide economic relief and care packages to prevent a rise in the homeless population due to loss of jobs stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### REFERENCES

**Homelessness NSW**, Retrieved from:  
<https://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/news/general-information-homelessness-and-covid-19#guidelines>

**Government of Canada**, Retrieved from:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/04/canada-announces-support-to-those-experiencing-homelessness-and-women-fleeing-gender-based-violence-during-the-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pandemic.html>