

BACKGROUNDER : STRATEGIES TO END HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

Ontario's second Poverty Reduction Strategy identified ending homelessness as a long term goal, but stopped short of offering specifics as to how this goal would be approached. In the strategy, the Government stated its intent to "seek expert advice on how to define the problem, measure it, collect data, and set targets" (p. 35). This backgrounder surveys definitions, indicators and targets currently in use in Ontario and other jurisdictions.

Defining the Problem and the Goal

A lot of work has already been done to define homelessness. Like Alberta, Ontario might simply adopt the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)*, or perhaps use the *Canadian Definition of Homelessness* as outlined by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network or CHRN. (See Table C for more information on these definitions.) What may require more consideration is precisely how to define the goal of "ending homelessness". For other countries and provinces, an important part of the definition has been shorter shelter stays. For example, in the report, *A Plan For Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years*, "[Ending homelessness means] those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days" (p. 14) and the recent CHRN *State of Homelessness in Canada 2014* report stresses that, "The goal of eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada should include shortening the average time people experience homelessness to less than two weeks" (p. 8). Most strategic plans include a similar type of time frame, though some define the goal of ending homelessness even more broadly – for example, Waterloo Region's strategy includes "realizing housing stability" as part of their definition of ending homelessness (p.4). Whether or not it includes timing on shelter stays, it will be important for Ontario to define exactly what is meant by the goal of "ending homelessness".



Measuring Homelessness and Strategies to End Homelessness

Measuring Homelessness

Good data collection on the scope of the problem is essential. The three most common methods of data collection on homelessness as identified by the CHRN include shelter counts (number of beds occupied in the shelter system), prevalence counts (how many people are homeless over a set period of time); and Point-in-time counts (which provide a "snapshot" of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a specific date.)

The European Union report "Measures of Homelessness at the European Union Level" recommends categories of Input, System, and Outcome indicators to measure strategies to end homelessness. The system indicator of "flow" which tracks turnover (number of people in the system at a given time) may also be worth considering as an indicator for Ontario.

Measuring Strategies to End Homelessness

Both the provincial and federal levels of government use their own indicators to gauge the impact of their funding programs, so it is likely that Ontario will use similar indicators to measure efforts towards the goal of ending homelessness. At a provincial level, Ontario's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) currently provides funding to municipalities to prevent and reduce homelessness in their communities. The CHPI 2013-14 Year-end Report is the first time that the Ministry has collected data on the performance indicators for the program. As per the CHPI Guidelines (2012), each municipality is required to report on ten indicators that measure the two CHPI program outcomes, as seen in the adjacent Table A.

The Ministry acknowledges that the performance indicator data is a first step to measuring results, and stresses commitment to collaborative adjustments to the indicators as required. (CHPI Program Guidelines, 2012). It is also important to note that the service delivery measured by these CHPI reports cover only the services that are funded through CHPI. Since 28 of 47 municipalities have indicated that they also use municipal funding to address homelessness, the CHPI data does not currently offer a complete picture of the problem or progress in Ontario, though it is certainly useful information.

At a Federal level, initiatives to combat homelessness through the HPS (Homelessness Prevention Strategy) are evaluated through "Key Performance Measures", a few examples of which are shown in Table B. The Federal government states that these measures are meant to evaluate relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of programming; and to support progress monitoring, reporting by management and evaluation (Terms & Conditions, par 20). The Federal government acknowledges that these indicators may be modified over time to ensure that they can adequately measure the program outcomes and successes.

Table A

A Provincial Measurement Tool: Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) Indicators as outlined in CHPI Program Guidelines 2012:	
Outcome	Indicator
#1 – People experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing	1.1 - # of nights a household spends in emergency shelter
	1.2 - # of households moved from homelessness to transitional housing
	1.3 - # of households moved from homelessness to long-term housing
	1.4 - # of households emergency shelter to transitional housing
	1.5 - # of households moved from emergency shelter to long-term housing
	1.6 - # of supports and services provided to households experiencing homelessness that are not related to the provision of accommodation but contribute to a positive change in housing status
#2 – People at risk of homelessness remain housed	2.1 - # of nights a household spends in emergency shelter
	2.2 - # of households at risk of homelessness that are stabilized (includes assistance with rental and energy arrears)
	2.3 - # of households receiving ongoing support/subsidy to retain their housing (at six months)
	2.4 - # of supports and services provided to households at risk of homelessness that are not related to the provision of accommodation but supports positive housing outcomes.

Table B

A Federal Measurement Tool: Key Performance Measures as identified in the "Terms and Conditions of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy":
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in the estimated number of shelter users who are chronically homeless; • Decrease in the estimated number of shelter users who are episodically homeless; • Decrease in length of shelter stay; • Percentage of individuals placed in housing through a Housing First intervention who maintain housing; • Amount invested by external partners for every dollar invested by the HPS.

Setting Targets

The majority of 10 year Homelessness plans surveyed for this backgrounder did not include specific, quantitative targets. More commonly, these reports included a lists of "Strategic Directions" or "Focus areas" or "Initiatives", and the target therefore would be to complete these tasks as outlined. While policy effort indicators such as these are important, the strongest plans to combat homelessness also include policy outcome indicators. Each municipality's plan surveyed included a different approach, and many of the included some degree of specificity in terms of measurable objectives. Ottawa's Alliance to End Homelessness stands out, as it has published a report card every year since 2005, tracking the number of people using emergency shelters; the length of shelter stay; the creation of affordable housing; and the affordability of housing. Only a few strategies set targets based on policy outcome indicators. Winnipeg's new plan, which includes very specific numerical targets, many which are aligned with the HPS targets, provides an example of how this can be done, as seen in Table C, below:

Table C

Example: Winnipeg's Five Year Targets towards Ending Homelessness

- Reduce the number of shelter users that are chronically homeless by 20% (2013/14 base year). *
- Reduce the number of Indigenous shelter users that are chronically homeless by 20% (2013/14 base year).
- Reduce the number of shelter users that are episodically homeless by 20% (2013/14 base year). *
- Reduce the number of Indigenous shelter users that are episodically homeless by 20% (2013/14 base year).
- Reduce the number of people living on the street (sleeping rough) by 20% (2013/14 base year). *
- Reduce the number of Indigenous people living on the street (sleeping rough) by 20% (2013/14 base year).
- Reduce the number of people with an average length of stay in an emergency shelter of more than seven consecutive days by 50%.
- Increase the supply of housing accessible to people who have been homeless by 300 units (2014/15 base year)(by 2016/17)
- Intervene to prevent 300 people from losing their housing.
- Reduce the number of homeless people as a percentage of the total population of Winnipeg by 10% annually

*Aligned with Government of Canada Homelessness Partnership Strategy targets
(Taken from Page 54 of Winnipeg's 2014 Plan to End Homelessness)

Conclusions

Much work has already been done to define, measure, and set targets around the complex problem of homeless. While developing Ontario's strategy will require time and thought, policymakers will be able to build on the good work already being done in Ontario municipalities, other provinces, and other countries around the world. The Government should be able build on this knowledge and outline a timeline and resource plan to end homelessness in Ontario in time for budget 2015-16.

References

- Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness (2008). *A plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years*. http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PlanForAB_Secretariat_final.pdf
- Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness (2013). *A plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Ten Years*. – Year Three Report. <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/homelessness-3-year-progress-report.pdf>
- Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa (2013) Report Card on Ending Homelessness. <http://endhomelessnessottawa.ca/annual-report-card-2013/2013-progress-report/>
- Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelessdefinition
- Canadian Observatory on Homelessness – Who Are We? (2014) Retrieved from <http://www.homelesshub.ca/CanadianObservatoryOnHomelessness>
- Edgar, B., Harrison, M., Watson, P., & Busch-Geertsema, V. (2007, January 1). *Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2007_study_homelessness_en.pdf
- Edmonton's Social Planning Council (2014). *Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness -- Year Five Update* <https://www.edmontonsocialplanning.ca/index.php/resources/digital-resources/d-housing/71-edmontons-10-year-plan-to-end-homelessness-year-5-update/file>
- European Federation of National Organizations working with the Homeless (2005) *Ethos Typology of Homelessness*. <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en>
- Gaetz, S., Gulliver, T. & Richter, T. (2014): *The State of Homelessness in Canada: 2014*. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press. <http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC2014.pdf>
- Government of Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada (2014). *Terms and Conditions of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy*. <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/funding/terms.shtml>
- Government of Norway (2005). *The Path to a Permanent Home*. Retrieved from <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143&lang=en>
- Government of Ontario (2012). *Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) Program Guidelines*. Retrieved from <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=10065>
- Government of Ontario, (2014). *Realizing Our Potential: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* <http://www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/realizing-our-potential-ontarios-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019>
- List of Links to National Homelessness Strategies. (n.d.). Retrieved November 19, 2014, from <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143&lang=en>
- Org Code Consulting (2013) *10-Year Municipal Housing & Homelessness Plan for the City of Kingston & the County of Frontenac* https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/13880/10Year_HousingHomelessness_Plan.pdf
- Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, Region of Waterloo. (2012). *"All Roads Lead to Home: The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region"* http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HHSS_WaterlooRegion_Strategy_2012.pdf
- Winnipeg's Community Task Force to End Homelessness (2014). *A Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg*. <http://unitedwaywinnipeg.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2014/04/wprc.plantoendhomelessness.april14.pdf>

Table D

Comparing Various Approches to Ending Homelessness

	Definition of Homelessness	Goals & Targets	Indicators & Measures
Theory from the European Union about Measuring Homelessness	ETHOS is the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, which is the standard used by European Union member states. "In the ETHOS typology the housing situation of people who are <i>absolutely homeless</i> is broadly categorized as roofless or houseless. Similarly, accommodation used by people who are <i>relatively homeless</i> is broadly classified as either insecure or inadequate. These four 'conceptual categories' are each divided into 'operational categories' (e.g., people living rough; people living in emergency accommodation; people due to be released from institutions."	FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organizations Working With the Homeless) monitors homelessness and homeless policies in the different EU Member States and internationally. Each country has its own goals and targets regarding homelessness, and links to the National Homelessness Strategies of the EU Member States homelessness policies can be found on the FEANSTA website (See Reference List). For example, Norway's "strategic objectives" have been identified as 1) Reducing the # of eviction notices & evictions 2) Increasing the # of people moving from prison to own home; 3) Increasing the # of people moving from treatment institution to own home; and 4) Higher quality of overnight shelter stays.	The EU report "Measures of Homelessness at the European Union Level" recommends the following indicators: <i>Input Indicators</i> - Number of people threatened with eviction (who are to be re-housed) - Number of people leaving institutions (Into arranged, temporary, supported or permanent accommodation) <i>System Indicators</i> - Number of people/households in the system (Occupancy Level) - Time Spent in the System (Average Duration) - Flow of people through the system in a given time period (Turnover) <i>Output Indicators</i> - Number of people/households re-housed in long term supported accommodation - Number of people/households moving into institutions - Number of people/households re-housed in permanent housing.
Provincial Policy Document Example: Alberta's 10 Year Strategy	While "A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years" did not make a point to create its own new definition of homelessness, instead adopting the ETHOS typology as their definition. The report emphasizes that "there are many faces of homelessness" and broadly categorizes people as the chronic homeless, transient homeless, and employable homeless, with explanations of each label. (p. 7).	<i>Goal</i> → Homelessness is ended in Alberta by 2019. "This will mean that even though there may still be emergency shelters available for those who become homeless, those who become homeless will be re-housed into permanent homes within 21 days." (p.14) <i>Target</i> → At the provincial level, specific numerical targets are not listed, though each city's plan becomes more specific in its targets. (Edmonton's five year report is particularly clear on these). The elements of the provincial plan are centered on 5 priority areas for action, followed by a subsequent 17 strategies in keeping with those areas. Some of the strategies are numerically measurable.	Alberta's initial 10 year plan did not state outcome indicators, however reporting on which of the identified strategies were completed could be considered policy effort indicators. Alberta's subsequent updates on the plan have published statistics indicating how many people have been provided housing and/or obtained "housing stability". The year 3 update also measures success based on what action occurred in response to the 17 mentioned "strategies" and how much money was spent on the problem.
Recommendations from the Canadian Homelessness Research Network	Canadian Homeless Research Network has published their "Canadian definition of Homelessness", organized in a typology that includes the following categories: 1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) At Risk of Homelessness	Proposals in the recent "State of Homelessness in Canada 2014" report from CHRN stresses that the goal of "Eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada" is possible and should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 20,000 chronically and episodically homeless Canadians obtaining and maintaining housing with necessary supports.• Shortening the average time people experience homelessness to less than two weeks. The report also includes goals and targets that relate to "Increasing the affordable housing supply" and "Reducing the number of precariously housed people". (p. 64-65)	CHRN acknowledges three ways commonly used to determine how many people are homeless: 1) Shelter counts (number of beds occupied in the shelter system) 2) Point-in-time (PIT) counts, which provide a "snapshot" of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a specific date. 3) Prevalence Counts, which determine how many people were homeless over a set period of time (used in some small and rural communities). On May 7 th , 2014 the Federal government passed Bill M-455, which recommends one nationally standardized PIT count for all municipalities. In response, the Canadian Observatory on Homeless (COH) has developed the Canadian Point-in-Time Count Methodology. This resource will be freely available and the COH will provide assistance to communities that are doing the work. The Canadian Point-in-time Count Methodology is set to be released in November of 2014. (State of Homelessness in Canada report, p. 21)