



HOMELESSNESS IN THE TERRITORIAL NORTH:  
STATE AND AVAILABILITY OF THE KNOWLEDGE

***HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT***

**Prepared for the Housing and Homelessness Branch,  
Human Resources and Social Development Canada**

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# Foreword

## Background to the Report

The Report examines the challenges, and the possible solutions, concerning the serious problem of homelessness in Canada's Territorial North. It pays special attention to how well the stakeholders have access to relevant, useful information about the causes of, and remedies for, territorial homelessness. This Report also examines how well connected, and able to access and share information, these stakeholders are. It proposes 17 practical recommendations with a view towards improving information sharing, and collaboration, between the people studying these challenges and the people working directly to manage or eliminate these challenges.

Consultant Andrew Webster wrote the Report for Housing and Homelessness Branch, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). The National Homelessness Initiative's National Research Program provided the research funding to MaxSys Consulting. The first phase, during 2005, comprised structured consultations with Northern stakeholders. Researcher Peter Jackson was responsible for the consultation research methodology and for the related data collection. Andrew Webster joined the Project in 2006 to analyse the consultations data, review the literature and the available statistical data, write the Report, and finalise the Project.

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## Citation

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## How to get a copy of the Report

The Highlights document will be posted in both official languages on the Housing and Homelessness Branch website [http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index\\_e.asp](http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp). To obtain a copy of the full Report, contact Marta Nestaiko, Research Analyst, Housing and Homelessness Branch, at [Marta.Nestaiko@hrsdc-drhcc.gc.ca](mailto:Marta.Nestaiko@hrsdc-drhcc.gc.ca).

## Statement by the Author

The views expressed in these documents are the Author's except where the views of informants, participants, and others are stated. The research, conclusions, and recommendations do not necessarily represent the views of Housing and Homelessness Branch or other branches of HRSDC.

On behalf of the officials and consultants involved in this Project, I wish to thank the stakeholder informants for their generous assistance. Their observations, along with words from Northern documentary and media reports, allowed me to describe the homelessness situation from the viewpoint of the people most associated with it. No one connected with this Project imagines that this contextual description is complete or even flawless. However, if it provides a more complete view of the complex situation, and suggests further research and opportunities for collaboration, we will feel amply rewarded.

It was unfortunately not possible to collect, directly, the observations of the ultimate stakeholders: homeless people in the three territories. There is good reason for a future project that systematically collects, and analyses, what these people have to say about the roots, experience, and solutions regarding their homelessness. I hope that the words and stories of some of these people, which I quoted from the news media, give the Report a human dimension and convey a sense that these people have wisdom that the human services worker, administrator, and researcher should heed.

## The “what”, “why”, and “how” of the Report

### “What” – The objectives of the Report

The Report is meant to encourage further research, improve the sharing of knowledge, and contribute towards a more effective allocation of scarce resources in mitigating the problems of homelessness in the Territorial North.

The Report examines the state of understanding of the challenges and the solutions regarding homelessness in the Territorial North. To this end, the Report has four objectives:

1. Describe, from the literature and other data, the context of territorial homelessness;
2. Assess, and observe upon, the information available to stakeholders, especially the stakeholders on the front line of dealing with homelessness in the Territorial North;
3. Solicit and summarise the views of stakeholders about the nature and remedies of the homelessness challenges that they face, and put these responses in a “big picture” perspective; and

4. Provide realistic recommendations about preliminary steps to address knowledge gaps, and to improve information sharing, networking, and collaboration between stakeholders.

## “Why” – The need for the Report

The idea for this Project came from an invitational community forum called “Toward a New Canadian Housing Framework”, held on 22 January 2005 at the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife.<sup>a</sup> A requirement for better information about Northern housing needs emerged as a strong theme. The participants felt that the housing needs, and priorities, of their community members must be determined by their communities, rather than by far-off researchers who lack attachment if not understanding. The Report recognises that Northern homelessness is clearly, but not strictly, a housing issue. Its causes, management, and solutions are many and involve various fields and professions. This Project, about information sharing on homelessness in the North, therefore includes a preliminary scan of stakeholder perspectives. The intent is to provide a clearer picture of the differing perspectives, to identify knowledge gaps, to propose measures to improve the state of the knowledge, to improve stakeholder collaboration, and to improve information sharing.

Housing and Homelessness Branch observed that the study of homelessness in the Territorial North – i.e., the three federal territories – appeared less developed than the study of homelessness in the provinces. This apparent deficiency is consistent with a need for further information collection and synthesis that is so evident in regards to Aboriginal homelessness in Canada. The Report confirms the belief of officials that the vast majority of territorial homelessness persons are Aboriginal. It also shows that the causes of homelessness, of Aboriginal *and* non-Aboriginal territorial people, sometimes have no parallel in the provinces. The Report provides an overview of the players, programmes, and policies involved. It examines the extent to which research, rather than reaction, is behind the priorities of the stakeholders who are part of the solutions or problems. Also, and above all, the Report asks how much relevant information is available, and to what extent the stakeholders can access information, share information, and collaborate.

These important questions had to be asked, using to the greatest extent possible the words of Northerners as evidence for the answers, within a report that conveys a sense of the “big picture”. The resulting Report therefore contains a long discussion of the historical, geographic, socio-economic, and other special factors that make territorial homelessness both unique and especially perplexing. The intent of this is to show that territorial homelessness is not what it may appear to be on the surface, and consequently, the ways to find and implement solutions are sometimes distinctive.

The Report does *not* propose measures to prevent or alleviate the problem of homelessness in the Territorial North. Its detailed discussion of the context of territorial homelessness is with a view towards furthering appreciation of the complexities and special challenges that are at play. Many questions arose, and few answers were found, but the Project has been foremost a first step in towards improving information sharing on Northern homelessness. This Report identifies clear deficiencies in the state of the knowledge and in information sharing. Its conclusions and recommendations therefore focus on realistic ways to begin addressing reflect these deficiencies.

The Report includes a bibliography identifying various documents that relate to homelessness in the North. This includes documents that do not seem to be well known.

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<sup>a</sup> This was one of the first of a series of nation-wide consultations conducted by the National Homelessness Initiative and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, with a view towards developing a new, long-term Canadian Housing Framework. This Framework is to be a strategic plan covering all aspects of the housing continuum, from emergency shelter such as for the homeless, to assistance for homeowners.

## “How” – The methodology used in the Report

This Report combines analysis of data from printed sources with new data obtained through a survey of key informants in the Territorial North. The data sources comprise a literature and media review, and information gained from a survey of key informants.

A search was made of the holdings of federal libraries for additional documents relevant to Northern homelessness. An additional electronic review examined Internet-available studies, reports, statistics, and media accounts of homelessness issues in recent years. The media scan portion of the Report’s literature review provides as much quotation from Northern observers and stakeholders as possible. The aim is to give a sense of the evolution of the homelessness landscape using the published words of Northerners. The words of the survey informants add to the richness of the complete picture.

The Researcher and his field assistants (one per territory) consulted documents about ethics and Northern homelessness before designing and administering the survey. Potential informants received a covering letter and questionnaire. The Researcher made follow-up telephone calls to clarify unclear responses and solicit further input. The first part of the questionnaire captured the informant’s name and co-ordinates, to allow for follow-up contact by the Researcher and for sending a copy of the final Report. The Researcher made assurances that the reporting would be anonymous. This promise was kept: the names and co-ordinates were removed when the survey data were forwarded to the Author of this Report.

The survey sought to assess the familiarity of informants with selected documents relevant to territorial homelessness. The Researcher did not provide any of these documents to the informants. It was realised that this might produce a low response rate if, as was confirmed, the stakeholders tend to be challenged to access the relevant literature. However, the main intent was to assess their access to the literature rather than rate their views on documents. The survey sought to obtain the following information:

- a) Information to categorise each informant’s involvement in homelessness issues, and to determine the informant’s access to the Internet.
- b) Information to assess the familiarity of informants with documents considered potentially relevant and useful.
- c) The views of the informants on the value or relevance of these documents.
- d) The sources of information, on homelessness issues, that the informants rely upon during the course of their work.
- e) The type and form of information, relating to their work on homelessness issues, that informants would prefer.
- f) The priorities of informants about homelessness in the Territorial North.

The survey was undertaken during the closing months of 2005. The small number of professionals assisting territorial homeless people made it hard to find informants. The Researcher was eventually able to contact 27 stakeholder organisations. Representatives of 22 of these completed a questionnaire. All 27 organisations participated in unstructured interviews. An additional stakeholder was later consulted. This did not provide enough mathematical certainty to tabulate the responses and generate statistics about what is deficient and improvements are advisable. Nevertheless, when compared with the literature search results, the observations of informants provided a fair sense of the “big picture”.

# The context of Northern homelessness

The Discussion part of the Report describes the main factors that set territorial homelessness apart from homelessness in the South. Some of these determinants are obvious. Others are obscure or misunderstood, even among Northern stakeholders. It is expected that this description will help stakeholders in the North and the South develop a more complete and balanced worldview of the situation.

An appendix contains the detailed analysis that these synthesis sections are based upon. Readers wishing an in-depth appreciation of the context, or who wish to follow up by reading the source literature, should consult this appendix. The Author cautions that, while this appendix is long and detailed, it is by no means the complete story. Furthermore, the synthesis sections, based on this appendix, reflect the Author's judgement about which main points are the most educational to most readers.

The Author felt that the needs of most readers, for a contextual description of Northern homelessness, are best served by a discussion that is organised under seven headings, as follows:

## Heading 1 - Historical considerations

- Widespread problems relating to housing shortage are relatively new in the Territorial North. Homelessness was not an issue to mobile groups of Aboriginal people able to construct their own shelters. It became an issue in recent decades when the Aboriginal population took up settlement-based life. The problems worsened when the supply of government-assisted housing increasingly failed to match population growth.
- The Yukon Territory (YT) was colonised early; clashing cultures and interests resulted in the creation of reserves for much of the Yukon's Indian population. Conversely, the treaty Dene in the NWT had little interest in reserves, and today the only inhabited and organised reserve in the NWT is at Hay River.
- There was little settlement, besides trading posts and missions, until World War 2 (WW2) brought roads, government presence, and infrastructure to support resource development. War also brought – especially in the Yukon – new epidemics. The War had less effect on the Inuit in what is now the Nunavut Territory (NT), but post-War military development had a profound effect.
- A national strategy to improve Indian health and socio-economic conditions began in 1945. The NWT and YT saw Indian nursing stations, Indian day schools, and systemic economic measures including initial access to the growing array of welfare state programmes. The early 1950s saw the construction of radar stations across the Central Arctic.
- A strategy, to encourage Natives to take up permanent residence, now began. Social programmes, including provision or denial of housing, rations, and government allowances, were used as leverage to entice Aboriginal people to settle in approved locations.
- The first housing assistance comprised building materials to help Indians with cabin construction. The federal government felt no obligation at all to help the Métis, who remain excluded from “Indian” programmes and services today. The Inuit at first received prefabricated “matchbox” houses with oil stoves. These early “welfare houses” were soon supplied in Indian settlements. Indian Affairs introduced an Indian and Eskimo Housing Programme in the early 1960s.

- The Yukon introduced the first comprehensive territorial housing programme in 1967. The Yukon Housing Corporation was created in 1972. The NWT's Housing Corporation followed in 1974. These housing corporations developed along similar lines. Their assistance grew from the rental and purchase programmes, to include homeownership assistance, access assistance, and expanded down payment assistance. Today the Nunavut Housing Corporation provides territorial housing assistance in NT.
- By the late 1960s, CMHC was deeply involved with the construction of facilities for children and seniors, assisting with delivery of low-income units, and providing loans direct to homeowners. CMHC was almost the only provider of mortgages. Private mortgages were available in Whitehorse and Dawson but were difficult to obtain elsewhere in the YT, and virtually unavailable in the NWT. Banks wanted dwellings insured. Insurance was, and still is not, available in some of the still-unincorporated settlements.
- CMHC has a significant but much less direct role today, except on Yukon reserves where its role remains significant. Elsewhere the housing corporations are the main players; the high cost of construction of modern, national-standard homes made their importance grow rapidly.
- The territories were hard-hit when, in 1993, the federal government froze new spending on social housing and stopped its off-reserve, Aboriginal-specific housing assistance. Excepting some locally funded projects, little if any new Aboriginal-specific housing was built for non-reserve Aboriginal households after 1993. Notwithstanding this, off-reserve Aboriginal people continue to receive assistance through the general programmes of the housing corporations.
- The Conservative Government's Spring 2006 Budget re-introduced federal contributions for off-reserve housing. To the Inuit and other off-reserve stakeholders, this seems a major victory. It remains to be seen how the off-reserve Aboriginal housing funding will be allocated, or indeed whether the Nunavut Housing Corporation will be able to access a portion of these funds for general rather than Inuit-specific housing. These questions aside, it appears that assistance to territorial off-reserve Aboriginal people is forthcoming. This should reduce some of the pressures towards homelessness; just how much is highly speculative.

## **Heading 2 - The jurisdictional landscape**

- The federal-provincial jurisdictional lines of responsibility, and disputes, regarding responsibility for homeless people are not replicated perfectly in the territorial context. We see similarities but also significant differences.
- There is a common perception that the federal government has a more direct responsibility towards homeless people in the territories than it has towards homeless people in the provinces. Yet the main problem is money, not jurisdiction. The Nunavut, NWT, and Yukon governments (in that declining order) are very dependent on federal transfers. They exercise province-like powers, but their weak economic positions mean a limited ability to address the homelessness problems that they face. There is a tendency to look to Ottawa for assistance under such circumstances.
- Aboriginal people comprise much of the territorial populations. It is widely, and wrongly, imagined that their welfare is legally and universally a federal responsibility. The federal government has long contended, in the courts, that it has no legal obligation to provide

programmes and services, including housing, to Aboriginal people on or off-reserves. It claims that its involvement is on humanitarian grounds, and once (in 1964) it unsuccessfully proposed to transfer all of its Indian programmes and services to the provinces.

- The provinces and territories deliver most programmes and services to Registered Indians off-reserve. In the South, the federal government provides a minimum of support on-reserve in the absence of provincial involvement. This rule applies, with some difference, in the North.
- The territorial housing corporations serve the entire populations in the NWT and Nunavut, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, with little distinction. This is also true in the Yukon, except on Yukon reserves, where the involvement of CMHC and INAC is more direct as it is in the provinces.
- The financing of housing on reserves is challenging. The *Indian Act* prohibits the seizure of the property of Indians on reserves. This makes it hard for reserve residents to obtain bank or other financing for building, repairing, or expanding their homes.
- Today we see an acceleration of regional, Aboriginal self-government in the YT and the NWT. The self-government arrangements give lawmaking capability in a wide range of areas including housing, but to date the self-governing communities have not exercised these powers much.
- In 1999, the NWT was split into a high Arctic territory (Nunavut or “NT”) and a western Arctic / sub-Arctic territory (the present NWT). This changed the location of Nunavut’s central government to Iqaluit, but not the delegated nature of territorial authority. Nunavut is *not* an Inuit self-government zone. It is a territory like the others, with a public legislature and system of public municipalities. Inuit control the political agenda due to their demographic dominance.

### **Heading 3 - Demographic considerations**

- The three territories occupy a vast land area but have, in total, barely 100,000 inhabitants.
- Their second demographic distinction is large Aboriginal populations: three quarters of Nunavut’s residents are Aboriginal, and nearly all are Inuit; 44% of NWT residents are Aboriginal, mostly North American Indian followed by Inuit and Métis; only 21% of Yukon residents are Aboriginal, and 90% of these are North American Indian.
- The territorial populations are growing slower than some people imagine. High Aboriginal birth rates drive much of the observed growth - especially in Nunavut. The NWT’s population is growing again after a rate decline in the 1990s.
- Major resource developments in the NWT (e.g., diamond mining and MacKenzie Valley petroleum) have attracted migrants from out-of-territory, but have not had the profound population impact that one might expect, when high Aboriginal birth rates are considered.
- The Yukon population is stable, despite growth of the Registered Indian cohort, because deaths and especially out-migration are balancing influences.
- There are no credible estimates of the number of territorial homeless, but the number is far greater than the people housed in emergency shelters. Systematic attempts to count the territorial homeless remain to be undertaken.

- Anecdotal reports indicate that that Aboriginal people comprise a visible and large part of the territorial homelessness problem in the larger centres, particularly the four municipalities<sup>b</sup> with homeless shelters. Aboriginal representation among the territorial urban homeless is very high.
- There is a severe lack of data about origins and migration of the territorial homeless, but we have a fair idea of the migration characteristics of the overall populations. These populations are extremely mobile, with very high rates of internal migration. Presumably, a mobile population, with limited economic opportunities and insufficient supply of shelter, will have a high incidence of homelessness. We also know that the mobility tendency of Aboriginal people can have numerous negative impacts upon the service agencies who attempt to provide these people with services, as well as negative impacts upon the clients themselves.
- As in the provinces, there is a trend of long-term migration from rural and isolated regions towards urban centres. Intra-territorial migration patterns – who moves from where – are poorly understood due to a shortage of data. The urbanisation trend is nonetheless clear from urban growth and rural decline, and from urban growth that is greater than rural growth.
- Urbanisation seems especially prevalent in the NWT. It is a less recent phenomenon in the Yukon, where 74% of the population live in and around the capital Whitehorse, and only one of 17 serviced communities is not on the road system. Most of Nunavut's population lives in small centres. Inuit migration to the capital Iqaluit is often cited as a cause of many homelessness-related problems, but credible migration statistics are unavailable.

#### **Heading 4 - Geographic and climatic considerations**

- Most of the inhabited regions have “permafrost” or permanently frozen ground. Farther north, it is continuous and up to 2,000 metres deep. Permafrost poses transport and engineering challenges in the construction of housing. The high cost of building roads is a major factor in the continued isolation of many communities, and a prime driver in the high cost of most goods and services.
- Most of the Yukon's communities are much better connected than their NWT counterparts. This is largely due to the Yukon's good all-weather road system and access to the Alaskan seaport of Skagway. Particularly away from the navigable waters where barges can operate, building supplies are commonly delivered via winter roads after freeze-up. The construction season is short. In all the territories, materials delivered in the summer are assembled into basic structures, which can be heated, before the winter makes outdoor work too difficult.
- The road situation in Nunavut is simple: the communities lack road connection with the outside and with each other. Ships deliver housing materials during the summer at extreme cost.
- For several decades, most structures built with government funding have taken into account the expensive problem of permafrost. Prolonged deep cold, often below -30°C, requires expensive extra insulation and robust heating arrangements. There are nevertheless still log homes in the YT and NWT with just a wood stove.

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<sup>b</sup> Iqaluit, Yellowknife, Inuvik, and Whitehorse.

- The cold requires homes to be kept closed up for most of the year. This makes special ventilation measures necessary so that moisture does not produce rot, mould, mildew, and moisture damage. Thus, the cold influences indoor air quality, especially when occupants smoke or the dwelling is crowded. The harsh environment reduces the life expectancy of housing units.
- Heating oil is transported under difficulty and at high cost. So too is the diesel fuel which powers most electricity generation. Fuel costs therefore have a major impact on the affordability of housing. Heating subsidies are consequently very important to territorial home occupants.
- Many of the homeless people in larger centres are from small, and often isolated, communities. The costs of travel, back and forth, can be extreme. Lacking money for fares, or means to travel such as a boat, the destitute homeless find it hard to return to their community of origin. Stranded away from their families and supports, often unemployed, and possibly in an unfamiliar cultural setting, they can experience additional psychosocial stresses.
- Disregarding homelessness in the North is not an option owing to the deep cold. In Nunavut, the temperature can approach minus 50°, while in the Yukon and NWT, minus 40° is not uncommon. An intoxicated person can come to injury or death under such conditions. Despite this, many homeless people in the North, sober or not, spend winter nights in unheated tents.
- Territorial authorities and charities face an elevated challenge in mitigating and treating weather injuries – and medical complications resulting from weather - among the territorial homeless. Extraordinary measures are sometimes taken to bring homeless people indoors so they will not die. These measures range from the invisible – such as residents bringing a person in overnight so he or she will not freeze – to the formal and highly politicised.

## **Heading 5 - Socio-economic considerations**

- Weak economic positions limit the ability of territorial governments to address their exceptional homelessness challenges. These governments are extremely dependent on federal transfer payments and challenged to raise own-source revenue to apply to non-core activities.
- So far, their core activities include housing programmes but not specific funded measures to address homelessness. The NWT leads in terms of economic activity yet three quarters of its revenues are federal transfers. Until its recent economic boom, the NWT tended to be less independent than the Yukon. Nunavut, with only 8.7% own-source revenue, has by far the greatest dependence and the least fiscal ability to address non-core issues.
- In recent years, the Yukon's economy has been the most stable and least dominated by government jobs. In the absence of major resource development, the Yukon's economic position is one of steady, natural, unspectacular growth. In the Yukon, unlike in the other territories, we do not see strong economic reasons for changes in homelessness problems or patterns. Additionally, because we lack migration data and data about the Yukon's homeless population, we cannot hypothesise much about homelessness trends in the Yukon.
- The Yukon's employment situation is far better than in the other territories. It is close to provincial norms. The unemployment rate on Yukon's reserves is probably very high. The Yukon has high levels of some social problems, particularly those related to poverty conditions, alcohol, and drugs. Yet there is reason to believe that the human side of the Yukon's overall socio-economic landscape is not as desperate as in the NWT or Nunavut. A recent major study

presents a comparatively favourable picture of some services and of some key indicators of social dysfunction. It would be too much to conclude that the Yukon's socio-economic landscape makes homelessness an issue less challenging than supposed. What might be concluded is that the NWT and Nunavut face additional, if not worse, socio-economic pressures of the sort which engender homelessness.

- The NWT has the only territorial economy that is growing sharply. Since 1999, its economy has risen by 69.0%, mostly due to diamond and petroleum development. The impacts of this transformation vary greatly and geographically. A strong urbanisation trend is underway. The boom has had a disproportionately positive impact on the well educated, who tend not to be Aboriginal. This imbalance is likely a factor in the high percentage of Aboriginal homeless in the major economic locales.
- The NWT's prosperity is neither uniformly enjoyed nor without social costs. The NWT, and the other territories, continues to experience high rates of social pathologies, in connection with insufficient economic opportunity, cycles of rapid development, and clashing of cultures. There are serious quality and co-ordination problems, in and between services relevant to homeless people. Without further research, we can only appreciate that the homelessness situation there is especially complex and without simple solutions.
- Nunavut's economy is locked in the grip of near-total dependence on government spending. We can best understand the socio-economic landscape in terms of progress that has not occurred over the last generation. In 1988 a report, entitled *Lords of the Arctic, Wards of the State*, described grim conditions prevailing at the time. It painted a bleak future for Inuit society if the social welfare system continued on its present course. Today, Nunavut gives the Inuit control of administration and of priorities, but as indicated by extreme reliance on transfers, not a greater degree of economic independence or capacity to implement robust programme solutions to a range of serious and entrenched socio-economic problems.
- A recent study explored the structured social services available to victimised Nunavut residents including some of Nunavut's homeless population. While there appears to be an array of social services in each Nunavut community, it is wrong to assume that there are adequate, or that they provide any services at all to victimised people including the homeless. The study made strong statements not just that social problems are systemic and overwhelming, but that Nunavut's service infrastructure is generally seriously deficient in fundamental ways.

## **Heading 6 - Supply and condition of housing**

- Three classes of housing exist in the territories as they do in the provinces: government staff housing, social (or public) housing, and private housing. However, the nature of home occupancy is fundamentally different, where the importance of public versus private housing is reversed compared with the South.
- Nunavut offers the extreme example. Although there are no reserves to complicate financing, only 7% of dwellings in Nunavut are occupant-owned. Seventy percent are social housing (45% of the total, with 99% occupation by Inuit), government staff houses, or rental units. Reliance on government housing assistance, by all segments of the population, is excessive.

- The NWT situation is not as extreme but still heavily dependent on public housing programmes. In 2005, just over one-half of homes in the NWT were privately owned, and a quarter was rented from private owners. Social housing accounted for 17% and staff housing 6%.
- Comparable figures for the Yukon are unavailable, but it is clear that private homeownership approaches provincial levels. Nunavut has almost no housing market to speak of. The NWT has a recognisable housing market in the larger centres, while in the smaller communities, it can be impossible to buy or sell a house. The Yukon's housing market is the best developed of all.
- Housing supply and affordability are not the only determinants of homelessness. However, in the territorial context where government housing units, government financing, and government subsidies are particularly important, housing programmes play a pivotal role in the prevention of homelessness and repatriation of homeless people to permanent dwellings.
- In Nunavut this dependence on government housing assistance extreme, in the NWT it is high, and in the Yukon it is significant. The role of federal housing programmes is extremely important on the Yukon's Indian reserves.
- In all territories, the houses of government workers are typically superior to those of surrounding residents, especially in remote communities. This can be a source of social discontent among the mostly Aboriginal local residents, who are often compelled to live in crowded and/or dilapidated quarters. Government employees usually receive accommodation when they work outside the community of their present residence. This assistance usually comprises allocation of a rental unit or assistance to purchase a home. Obtaining a government job is usually the best way to fast-track access to accommodation.
- Other issues described in detail in this section are: loss of housing – a special northern challenge; the Nunavut housing situation; the NWT housing situation; and the Yukon housing situation.
- Note that the Yukon's overall housing situation, while beset with challenges sometimes unlike and additional to those in the provinces, is the least desperate of the territories, although the housing situation on Yukon's reserve seems very serious.

## **Heading 7 - Programmes, services, and facilities for territorial homeless people**

- This section describes the organised measures, in each territory, to prevent or deal with homelessness. Rather than repeat the list here, let us consider some key points about the challenges faced by organisations and individuals attempting to assist Northern homeless people.
- The capitals of each territory have a general-type homeless shelter run by a benevolent society. The regional NWT town of Inuvik also has such a shelter. Northern emergency shelters tend to be under-funded, prone to cyclical management crisis and financial collapse, occasionally troubled by apathy among donators and even board members, and overwhelmed by applicants seeking accommodation. Some homeless people live in tents year-round, and even break into buildings, given the unavailability of other shelter.
- Nunavut has the most extreme homelessness problems, best described by the Nunavut Government's own words:

*Nunavut's profound housing challenges are situated in a remote, Arctic environment where, for many months of the year, flesh freezes in seconds, not minutes. Absolute homelessness per force does not exist in the territory. Instead, Nunavut's "hidden homeless" sleep in shifts within already overcrowded homes, homes that average less than 1,000 square feet in size and that offer living space cramped by potable water tanks, washers/dryers, furnaces and hot water makers. In a territory that represents more than one-fifth of Canada's land mass, suitable, adequate living space is a scarce resource rather than a basic right.*

- An informant from an Inuit organisation stated:

*In the Inuit regions, the homelessness is what we term "hidden" because people won't put others on the street at forty below. So homelessness is really reflected in the severe overcrowding.. and it is at the heart of the social disorder...Even in Nunavut, where it's really cold, you find destitute people drifting from home to home looking for overnight accommodation. Families ask themselves: "Do I let him freeze?" No, they can't.*

*So they take them in and it's a cycle of house to house. You also have to always ask yourself questions, like: 'Can I get rid of this person?', 'Will my family get sick?', and 'how far can I trust him?' It's not a good feeling when it's a whiteout and you have some smashed or stoned guy crashing on your couch or the floor." You can call this 'hidden homelessness' if you want, but it seems pretty absolute to me.*

- The Report, *Homelessness in the Territorial North: State and Availability of the Knowledge*, examines among other things the socio-economic dislocations resulting from the present, unprecedented, resource-driven economic boon in the NWT. Those facts need no repeating in this Highlights document, but they form the backdrop of the NWT's current homelessness patterns. They also set the character of homelessness in the NWT – at least partially – apart from the character of homelessness in the other two territories.
- An examination of factors (e.g., demography, socio-economic conditions, housing supply, etc.) suggests that the Yukon's homelessness landscape is different from the other territories. It seems closer to a provincial landscape. The organisations attempting to assist the Yukon's homeless population work within this unique milieu. This does not, however, suggest that homelessness is less of a challenge in the Yukon.

## Findings

### Extent of information on Northern homelessness

From the contextual research, undertaken during the course of this Project, it is apparent that the corpus of statistical, descriptive, and analytical literature relevant to Northern homelessness is greater than generally thought. Making this source information more generally available will further basic research that has to be done. This should also help delivery agencies improve their services to the homeless.

There is an almost complete lack of the quantitative data needed to understand some of the drivers of Northern homelessness. No attempts at quantitative or rigorous qualitative research seem to have taken place. Policy and programmes continue to be anchored on anecdotal evidence, field reports and correspondence from officials, and the 'school of hard knocks' when shelters, particularly, have to turn away clients whom they lack space for. Many of these necessary data could be collected and shared,

given co-ordination, data protocols, standardised formats, and not necessarily at high cost. There is currently no discernable movement towards making this happen. Leadership would be required.

The statistics needed to explain, and project, homelessness patterns are more varied than simply counts of homeless people in shelters, or estimates of tent occupancy. Foremost it is necessary to examine three things: migration patterns in light of socio-economic change; aggregate caseload data such as shelter counts and contacts with social services; and comparisons of standardised individual level case data. These are all possible, given proper co-ordination and privacy protection for individual data. Failure to do so will condemn the stakeholders to reacting to challenges as they occur, and delivering programmes which at times are questionably effective and which sometimes re-invent the wheel. The latter is especially apparent from the cyclical crises that all territorial shelters seem to experience.

Recommendation 1: Commence a research and consultation project to identify the statistical data needed to understand trends in Northern homelessness. This project should also identify data issues.

Recommendation 2: As a next step, commence a project to develop standardised indicators ranging from shelter head counts to individual-level linkages with programmes such as housing and social assistance.

Recommendation 3: Ideally, Recommendations 1 and 2 would occur under the guidance of the data committee of the Working Group proposed in Recommendation 4.

## Information sharing

The Northern stakeholders who deal with homelessness tend to be out of touch with existing technical resources on matters pertaining to homelessness. This is not because they lack access to the Internet; generally, their Internet access is good.

Information exchange between Northern stakeholders generally could stand great improvement. This extends to information sharing between concerned territorial agencies, not just between NGOs. Compared with their Southern counterparts, Northern stakeholders seem to have a lower level of familiarity with any literature on homelessness. This is apparently not usually by choice. Over half of the informants identified general or specific documents or types of information that they could use. These are often available when one knows where to look.

Access to, or familiarity with, documents on territorial homelessness appears unconnected with whether or not the informant is situated in a larger centre, where presumably access to information would be easier. This, and the poor level of access and familiarity, combine to make a strong case for a co-ordinated means of alerting Northern stakeholders to documents of potential interest. A bulletin system, and/or a periodically updated, annotated bibliography, comes to mind as ways to overcome this problem.

The high costs of travel, and of long-distance telephone communication, make the Internet the logical mode for improving information sharing about Northern homelessness. The infrastructure is in place and the stakeholders are connected – or can become connected in most cases without high cost.

With minor exceptions perhaps, Northern stakeholders are operating in silos in terms of information sharing. In this regard, there appears a clear lack of co-ordination or leadership is evident in each territory. Leadership is necessary. It does not seem that this leadership will materialise, in the near future, without outside assistance and funding.

Lacking information to think otherwise, it is prudent to assume that information sharing is no better between territories. There is no “Northern clearing house on homelessness information”, nor a common structure or voice. These are needed, bearing in mind that economy of scale, and critical mass, preclude duplicating such an initiative for each territory.

Recommendation 4: The Housing and Homelessness Branch should propose, and facilitate the establishment of, a standing “Working Group on Territorial Homelessness”. This body should comprise a manageable number of the main governmental and NGO stakeholders in Northern homelessness. This body would have a mandate to conduct research, communicate common messages, facilitate dialogue, and issue reports particularly an Annual Review of Northern Homelessness. Modest and inexpensive outputs, such as these, would go a long way towards improving collaboration and state of the knowledge.

Recommendation 5: In connection with Recommendation 4, if possible, establish a web-based “Northern Homelessness Network” of all stakeholders in Northern homelessness. There seems no reason why this network could not include northern provincial stakeholders who experience homelessness challenges similar to those of their Territorial colleagues.

Recommendation 6: The proposed Northern Homelessness Network should make maximum use of broadband webcast capability to hold routine and special meetings and conferences between stakeholders.

Recommendation 7: Known and future documents, which concern Northern homelessness, should be collected (or at least indexed and linked) for free electronic access on a dedicated website that is highly user-friendly. This initiative should involve an updated, annotated bibliography and a web-based system to notify stakeholders of additions.

Recommendation 8: To the extent possible, these documents should be in “.pdf form” in order to facilitate local printing.

Recommendation 9: Establish a convention so that publicly available “.pdf form” documents on Northern homelessness are *not* locked against users copying sections for research and planning purposes; locked documents can only be viewed or printed.

Recommendation 10: Index web-based documents on Northern homelessness by topic, keyword, and title. They should be searchable through a search engine accessible on the site. The index should contain an “annotated bibliography” type description for each document.

Recommendation 11: Statistics, or links to statistics, on Northern homelessness should be available on or through the same site as the documents.

Recommendation 12: The source documents and statistics available on / through this website should include information which is not homelessness-specific but which is relevant to understanding territorial background and context.

## Types of Northern homelessness

“Hidden homelessness” applies when persons live in overcrowded and/or inadequate conditions. The literature review, media scan, and informants are consistent that hidden homelessness is a pervasive, widespread, and improperly appreciated problem in the North. The gravity of this problem appears poorly understood in the South, from where Northerners draw support and financial assistance.

Substantial and credible evidence proves that the contention, that absolute homelessness does not exist in the North, is false.

Recommendation 13: Further debate, on the hypothesis that absolute homeless does not exist in the North, should cease on grounds that it would be a distraction from more pressing and practical issues.

Recommendation 14: Territorial hidden homelessness should be the subject of a specific study. Among other things, this study should quantify the number of new households that would form if the problem of hidden homelessness were fully addressed. It should also quantify the prevalence of “couch surfing”, and estimate the extent to which households give, on humanitarian grounds, temporary shelter to homeless non-family members. In order to be useful this study should include a large-scale sampling of households.

## Extent and trajectory of Northern homelessness

There are sufficient demographic, socio-economic, and descriptive data to conclude that the Yukon’s overall homelessness problem is not intensifying as it is in the other territories. The Yukon’s population and economy are generally stable. Its social housing stock appears adequate. We can say this in regards to the general population. We cannot say this in regards to the Yukon’s reserve-based First Nations, where data are harder to come by. This does not suggest that homelessness in the Yukon is not a problem, but rather, that the statistics on homelessness in the Yukon are deficient (See Recommendations 1 to 3).

Homelessness in the NWT is a serious practical problem with multiple social and economic consequences. This problem has existed for many years, largely due to chronic shortage of housing, but it has intensified sharply in connection with the Territory’s recent economic boom. The NWT is now on the brink of another mega-development: the MacKenzie Valley pipeline and associated petroleum production. Realising that this will have significant socio-economic impacts that will need mitigation measures, the federal government has identified (conditionally) \$500 million to mitigate anticipated effects. This may, or many not, offset the increased homelessness expected from factors such as migration. This is a situation that deserves monitoring and analysis.

Recommendation 15: The social impacts monitoring associated with the MacKenzie project should include analysis of impacts on homelessness particularly in respect of economic-driven migration.

By all accounts, the extent, trajectory, and spin-off consequences of homelessness in Nunavut are truly dreadful, and indeed difficult for some Southerners to believe. The evidence is overwhelming and the Author has never found occasion to make such blunt a pronouncement in a report. These facts ought to be better understood in the South, from where money for the solutions flows. Southerners may feel that the recent the \$300M federal investment in territorial housing has solved the problems of crowding and homelessness, but most likely, these problems will only be stabilised or mitigated.

Recommendation 16: Northern stakeholders should be mindful of a need to counter a possible Southern tendency towards imagining that recent investments adequately address territorial housing shortages. This calls for co-ordination and common voice, a strategic plan including a communications strategy, and new, solid data to describe the reality.

In Nunavut, an almost non-existent housing market, near-total dependency on federal transfers, and high rate of income assistance dependency, clearly require the investment of huge sums in order to increase the supply of social housing. Nunavut is alone, among the territories, in having such a clear main solution to its homelessness problem. The problems and solutions in the other territories are more multivariate.

The \$300M recently earmarked for Northern housing will certainly have a positive effect on mitigating or reducing territorial homelessness. The \$500M for mitigating socio-economic impacts in the NWT will likely also have a beneficial effect, in the NWT, if the MacKenzie gas project receives full approval.

However, we cannot say that the homelessness situation in the NWT will improve owing to further socio-economic dislocation expected from the MacKenzie gas project. The additional funding available to the GNWT may be insufficient, and besides, the situation is multivariate and increased funding is not the only solution. Nonetheless, this is a large injection and clearly welcome, although the distribution and conditions associated with this funding are unclear at present. This seems an ideal opportunity to establish a multi-year research to assess the now-and-after affects of the major construction schemes on territorial homelessness.

Recommendation 17: Establish inter-governmental and inter-stakeholder discussions with a view towards establishing a large-scale research project to examine the effects of the major housing investments on the incidence and character of territorial homelessness. The federal and the territorial governments may all be in positions to assist such a project.