

**Homelessness In Toronto**

**STATE OF  
EMERGENCY  
DECLARATION**

*An Urgent Call For*  
**Emergency Humanitarian Relief  
&  
Prevention Measures**

**Toronto Disaster Relief Committee  
October 1998**

*all human rights for all*

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

**1948-1998**

*“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being for himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25,  
proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

*“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living ..., including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right.”*

International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966.  
Ratified by Canada and entry into force in Canada on 19 August 1976.

*“Inadequate shelter and homelessness are growing plights in many countries, threatening standards of health, security and even life itself. Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.”*

Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda,  
United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), June 1996

## Homelessness in Toronto – Emergency Declaration

***“[P]overty is a serious breach of equality rights which I believe has no place in a country as prosperous as ours. Experience suggests that it is largely those who are most vulnerable in our society by virtue of the various prohibited grounds of discrimination ... who are also more likely to be poor.... It is now time to recognize poverty as a human rights issue.”***

Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay, Chair, Canadian Human Rights Commission,  
Introduction to the 1997 *Annual Report* of the Commission, March 1998.

***“Homelessness is the predictable result of private and public-sector policies that exclude the poor from participating in the economic revolution, while safety nets are slashed in the name of ‘global competitiveness’. Moreover, the situation is perpetuated by a deep reluctance to tackle the roots of the problem... The principles of economic and social rights – an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... – are trampled without regard or regret.***

Philip Alston, Chair, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva  
in “Hardship in the Midst of Plenty,” *The Progress of Nations 1998*, NY: UNICEF.

***“The Committee notes the omission from the [Canadian] Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness. Given the evidence of homelessness and inadequate living conditions, the Committee is surprised that expenditures on social housing are as low as 1.3 percent of Government expenditures.”***

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Geneva  
From a 1992 Report Critical of Canada's Human Rights Record

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**1.**

**It Is Time to Act:  
Homelessness is Unacceptable**

When a few people in a community have no housing due to a fire or some other tragic event, or when hundreds of people become displaced because of some disaster, the community mobilizes. To do otherwise is unthinkable.

When many people are unhoused we have a community-wide crisis. When the numbers are allowed to grow, and when all reasonable analyses point to even more homeless people everyday, we have a disaster – a situation requiring emergency relief and prevention measures – in the same way as when a flood or a storm leaves many people homeless. All people must be protected from becoming homeless, from having inadequate food, and from being exposed to life and health-threatening circumstances.

When enough people care to learn about the nature and extent of the current disaster they will see that there is a single fundamental fact about all of the homeless: the very large gap between the cost of adequate housing and the money available to pay for it. This is the beginning and the end of the story about a key common feature of all the diverse individuals we label ‘the homeless.’ They are people who once had housing but, for a variety of reasons, are now unhoused.

As one of the most economically prosperous nations on earth, Canada is a country with an enviable human rights record, including some of the social and economic rights (health care, education, old age security). But our public and private institutions are organized in such a manner that one of the now ‘normal’ outcomes is that a growing number of people are excluded from having an adequate and secure place to live. For some this is a temporary situation, for some an occasional situation, for others it is a long term reality.

## Homelessness in Toronto – Emergency Declaration

Having no place to live means being excluded from all that is associated with having a home, a surrounding neighbourhood and a set of established community networks. It means being exiled from the mainstream patterns of day-to-day life. Without a physical place to call ‘home’ in the social, psychological and emotional sense, the hour-to-hour struggle for physical survival replaces all other possible activities. Without an address it is virtually impossible to access some essential social services and it is very difficult to get a job.

People with no place to live, those who have no physical and psychological place of their own to call home, are the most completely *excluded* group of people in society. On becoming homeless, people enter a different world from the rest of society. Survival is the main goal. It is a nightmare world completely apart from the normal day-to-day pattern of living.

Most who find themselves in this situation migrate to the centre of larger urban areas where some emergency survival services for people without housing are available. Most roam from place-to-place and from service-to-service to ensure their physical survival. The ‘dehousing’ processes operating in society are producing a diaspora of the excluded, struggling to survive without a place to call home.

**2.**

## **State of Emergency Declaration**

### **Homelessness: A National Disaster**

*We call on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster requiring emergency humanitarian relief. We urge that they immediately develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy using disaster relief funds both to provide the homeless with immediate health protection and housing and to prevent further homelessness.*

*Canada has signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living ... including adequate food, clothing and housing." Homeless people have no decent standard of living; our governments are violating these Human Rights.*

*Despite Canada's reputation for providing relief to people made temporarily homeless by natural disasters, our governments are unwilling to help the scores of thousands of people in Canada condemned to homelessness.*

*Morally, economically, socially, and legally, we cannot allow homelessness to become "normal" in Canadian life. Inaction betrays many thousands of us to a miserable existence and harms our society for years to come.*

## ***WHY DECLARE AN EMERGENCY?***

### ***Disaster Now***

- ❑ Crisis facilities are already overcrowded. People are ending up in the streets, parks, and alleyways
- ❑ Youth and families with children are the fastest growing population in shelters
- ❑ Major cities search far beyond their boundaries for temporary housing for homeless families
- ❑ Homeless people face poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and increased risk of violence, communicable diseases and compulsive drug use
- ❑ Homelessness causes psychological and emotional pain that can exacerbate or precipitate agonizing deterioration of mental health
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness permanently harms people; ultimately, it can kill them by exposure, illness, violence or suicide
- ❑ Homelessness prevents people from maintaining their health, finding and keeping work, attending school and exercising their rights as citizens
- ❑ Conservative estimates concur that about 200,000 Canadians are homeless

### ***Worse To Come***

- ❑ Shelters and other temporary measures provide at best a stopgap. Crowding, insecurity and the risk of disease or violence means prolonged stays harm people
- ❑ Homelessness is contributing to a developing toxic brew of disease including HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, and other communicable infections
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness for children harms them for life
- ❑ Twenty years of research has shown a continual rise in homelessness, linked to unemployment, reductions to social assistance, cuts to public housing and inadequate tenant protection
- ❑ Repeated government task forces, other studies, inquests and recommendations have produced little action, though documenting that the situation worsens yearly

## ***Declaring an Emergency***

We urge all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster now, as a first step in implementing a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy, both short- and long-term.



***Immediate Short Term Measures***

- ❑ Governments should reopen and maintain services for the homeless
- ❑ All governments should immediately reinstate or establish adequate social assistance benefits
- ❑ All governments should make suitable public buildings available as emergency shelters or hostels.
- ❑ Even parks can serve as temporary refuges with mobile homes, tents, bath houses and toilets
- ❑ Governments should concertededly provide emergency medical relief, including clinics, outreach, infirmaries, screening and immunization, and public nutrition and hygiene programs
- ❑ Health strategies should especially treat the relationship between homelessness and severe infectious or communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, and hepatitis
- ❑ Governments should grant immediate emergency funding to non-governmental organizations (churches, charities, non-profit groups, etc.)

***Long-term Measures to be Implemented Now***

- ❑ Governments should implement a “1 per cent solution”: All levels of government now spend an average 1 per cent of their total budgets on housing. Adding another 1 per cent, and henceforth devoting the total 2% to long-term housing, would take the single largest step towards eliminating homelessness.
- ❑ Governments should maintain and fund social benefits and services on a stable, long-term basis
- ❑ Crisis shelters and aid agencies should receive stable, long-term funding until the homeless are housed

*The homeless situation is worsening daily at an alarming rate, as the factors creating it remain unchecked.*

*Any delay in firmly and massively responding will only contribute to compounding the present crisis of suffering and death which is already an epidemic which no civilized society can tolerate.*

3.

### The Scale of the Disaster

*“Based on the findings of the study, homelessness is an increasing problem in Metropolitan Toronto, affected by multiple causes interacting with each other, i.e., a decline in affordable rental stock (especially rooming houses) in centrally located areas, low vacancy rates in the rental market, high levels of unemployment, and provincial policies regarding de-institutionalization.”*

This was not written last week or last year. It is from a 1982 Metro Toronto Government study:

*No Place to Go – A Study of Homelessness in Metropolitan Toronto: Characteristics, Trends and Potential Solutions, 1982.*

In 1982 there were 1,500 emergency hostel beds in Metro.

Now there are about 5,000.

**Incomes of Renters – DECREASING**

**Amount Spent on Rent – INCREASING**

Information collected during the 1996 Census helps explain why more tenants are having trouble paying their rent. Renters in Canada have less real income than five years

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ago and they are spending more on housing as percent of their household income. As a group, renters have about half the household income of homeowners.

- In 1996 32% of all 1.5 million households in the greater Toronto area (the ‘Toronto CMA’) were paying more than 30% of their household income on housing; up from 27% in 1991.
- In 1996 44% of all 615,000 renters in greater Toronto were paying more than 30%; up from 33% in 1991.
- The average income of the households spending over 30% on housing in greater Toronto fell 23% in constant (inflation adjusted) dollars, from \$35,000 in 1991 to \$27,000 in 1996.
- The gap between the average household income of owners and renters is very large and continues to grow. For Ontario’s households in 1996: Owners, \$66,000; Renters, \$33,600.

With such a large gap between the incomes of owner and renter households the private sector cannot build more housing for most renters *and* make money. There is no *effective market demand* for new rental housing. There is tremendous *social need* for more adequate, appropriate and affordable rental housing. Without a significant government role, no new rental housing will be built for those most in need.

### **Rental Housing Starts – Near ZERO**

### **Social Housing Starts – ZERO**

Housing starts in the greater Toronto area, as monitored by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, demonstrate the inability of the housing market to supply rental housing. In 1996 the last of Ontario’s social housing units were built, 782 units out of a total of 19,000 housing starts that year. The private sector built only 146 rental units in 1996. Virtually all the starts were for owner occupiers – who have sufficient income to pay for new housing.

Last year was a much better year for housing construction in the greater Toronto area. There were a total of 25,600 housing starts. However, there were zero social housing

starts and only 252 private sector rental housing starts. 99% of house construction was for the ownership sector.

### **Poverty in Canada – INCREASING**

*Poverty Profile 1996* is the latest in a series of reports on poverty in Canada by the National Council of Welfare based on data collected by Statistics Canada.

In 1996, five years after the last recession, 5.1 million Canadian children, women and men lived in poverty. While the rest of the economy enjoyed modest growth year after year, the overall poverty rate reached 17.6 percent. In 1989 the House of Commons resolved to eradicate child poverty by 2000. Only four years before that target date, child poverty had risen to 20.9 percent, the highest in 17 years.

A comparison of poverty rates for renters and homeowners in 1996 finds almost 40% of all renters in poverty and about 20% of all homeowners.

In terms of the actual dollars that poor people had to live on, a total of 268,000 families and 423,000 unattached people had 1996 incomes that amounted to less than half the poverty line.

The United Nations designated 1996 the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. The Council notes that: “Sadly, poverty statistics for 1996 show that Canada came no where near to meeting that goal.”

The report also noted that “winning the war on poverty is not an unrealistic goal.”

*“Statistics Canada estimates that the cost of bringing all poor people out of poverty in 1996 would have been \$17.8 billion. That’s a huge, but not outrageous amount of money in a country where the federal, provincial and territorial governments spent \$386 billion in 1996 and where the value of all goods and services produced was \$820 billion.”*

### **Shelter Use in Toronto – INCREASING**

- On any given day in 1996, about 3,100 different individuals used Toronto's emergency shelters. This is an increase from 2,600 in 1994 and 2,100 in 1988.
- In 1996, almost 26,000 different people used Toronto's emergency shelter system.
- Families accounted for 13 percent of shelter *cases* in 1996 but represented 46 percent of the *people* using shelter beds in that year.
- In 1996, 19 percent of the people using shelters – 5,300 – were children.
- More than 80,000 people (about 4% Toronto's population) are at risk of becoming homeless (people spending over 50% of their income on rent or living in extremely precarious situations).
- On any given night in Toronto
  - over 3,000 men, women and children are staying in an emergency shelter,
  - about 37,000 qualified applicants are on a waiting list for subsidized housing, and
  - about 40,000 additional people are precariously housed – some of whom will become homeless.

### **Assistance for Toronto's Poor & Unemployed – DECREASING**

- In 1996 36% of Toronto's renter households lived in poverty – an increase since the early 1990s recession ended (poverty among homeowners was 7.2% in 1996).
- Renters' incomes fell by 12 percent in real terms between 1990 and 1995 (homeowners' incomes fell by 5 percent).
- In the late 1980s, only 3% of the City's population received social assistance; at the end of 1996, 8% (compared to 3% in the rest of the GTA)
- Changes in the federal unemployment system mean that only 40% of the unemployed in the Greater Toronto Area received benefits, compared to 68% in 1993.
- Changes in provincial social assistance mean that fewer people are eligible and benefits were cut by 21.6% in 1995. Medical and drug benefits that were available for the working poor have been eliminated, as has the \$37-a-month pregnancy allowance. Fewer disabled people will be eligible for benefits due to a new more restrictive definition of disability.

### **Rental Housing Demand/Need in Toronto – INCREASING**

## Homelessness in Toronto – Emergency Declaration

- Based on normal population increases, an additional 7,500 to 9,500 rental housing units are needed in the GTA each year between 1996 and 2001.
- Rents in licensed rooming houses tend to be about \$450 per month; rent in accessory apartments (often illegal basement conversions) are from \$400 to \$750; the housing allowance component of social assistance for single person is \$325.

### **Rental Housing supply in Toronto – DECREASING**

- Between 1990 and 1995 apartments at the lower end of Toronto's rental market have been lost:
  - 4,500 bachelor apartments renting under \$500 per month;
  - 27,600 one-bedroom apartments renting for under \$600 per month;
  - 22,200 two-bedroom apartments renting for under \$700 per month; and
  - 4,100 three-bedroom apartments renting for under \$800 per month.
- There are many hundreds of illegal, unlicensed and often unsafe rooming houses.
- The number of licensed rooming houses is steadily declining: 603 in 1986; 393 in 1998.
- Subsidized housing is also being lost: since 1992 the Province has cancelled rent supplement subsidies for 700 apartments; scattered site detached and semidetached family public housing units are now being sold; CMHC has allowed subsidized private sector apartment building owners to buy their way out of low-rent agreements – a loss of 6,100 low-rent units.
- No new social housing is being built: an average of 2,100 units per year were built in Toronto over the past two decades. The Federal government ended its supply program in 1992; the provincial government did the same in 1995.

4.

**A Life and Death Situation for Some;  
Serious Long-Term Health Consequences for Most**

*“The relationship between homelessness and health has been clearly demonstrated in numerous studies over the past decade.*

*Homelessness is injurious to people's health and the situations in which homeless people are often compelled to live may be as hazardous to their health as the streets themselves.*

*Homeless people are at increased risk for tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases, trauma, major mental illnesses, alcoholism and its sequelae, drug abuse and dependence, sexually transmitted diseases, and a host of other relatively minor, but nonetheless impairing, respiratory, dermatological, vascular, nutritional, and psychiatric disorders.*

*What is more, the sick and disabled are often those who become homeless.*

*Homelessness should be recognized as a major public health concern.”*

From: “Editorial: It's Time for the Public Health Community to Declare War on Homelessness,” *American Journal of Public Health*, Feb. 1997.

## Homelessness in Toronto – Emergency Declaration

Toronto's health care professionals report that the overall health status of Toronto's homeless population is declining due to overcrowding in the hostels, more people who must sleep outside year round, and, due to social agency funding crises, less access to adequate food, transit tokens (to access emergency services), and hygiene supplies.

- there are increasing reports of death related to homelessness
- the longer people homeless, the more likely they are to suffer serious and long term mental and physical health problems
- high rates of infectious disease is now very common, including bronchitis, pneumonia, serious skin infections, gastro-intestinal infections, Hepatitis B and C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (commonly reported by health care workers and research)
- 38% TB infection rate among Toronto's homeless
- health impacts of drugs and alcohol combined with lack of treatment facilities include higher risk of skin and blood infections, overdoses, cardiac problems, liver disease and cognitive impairment
- malnutrition, hunger, vitamin deficiencies
- 59% of a sample of young street-involved women had been pregnant. Of these one third experienced miscarriage, 23% had pre-term babies and 13% a neonatal death (1997 study by SHOUT)
- high incidence of chronic health problems (diabetes, arthritis, liver disease) which worsen quickly due to state of homelessness
- this past winter and spring lice/scabies infestations of epidemic proportions, directly related to crowded shelter and emergency accommodation conditions and the forced migration between emergency facilities
- access to health care is a major problem for the approximately 40% of Toronto's homeless population who do not have health cards
- high incidence of injury and assault especially in last year



## 5.

### **Our Moral and Legal Obligations: Homelessness is a Serious Human Rights Violation**

All human rights violations are acts that disregard human dignity and the rule of law. The moral and ethical codes of the World's religions, international law, the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and federal and provincial human rights legislation, oblige Canadians and Canadian governments to refrain from acts, omissions, or other measures that result in violations of human rights.

The very existence of people who do not have any housing is by itself a most serious human rights violation. Societies with homeless people amidst great prosperity have established and are maintaining homeless-creating processes – day-to-day 'normal' mechanisms which result in people becoming unhoused and remaining unhoused, often for long periods of time. These are dehousing processes.

A household's right to adequate housing is violated under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights when the nation fails to continue making progress towards adequate housing for everyone to the extent that its resources allow. All nations, provincial/state and municipal jurisdictions must set achievable and measurable benchmarks for progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. These rights must be enjoyed equally, without discrimination.

In 1990, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued a legal opinion which defines when a state is in violation of its obligations relating to the right to adequate housing. One form of violation is a:

*general decline in living and housing conditions, directly attributable to policy and legislative decisions by States parties, and in the absence of accompanying compensatory measures, would be inconsistent with the obligations found in the Covenant. (General Comment No. 4, Paragraph 11)*

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In a related UN report on actions which constitute housing rights violations, the following five apply to the Canadian and Ontario governments:

- Acts of racial or other forms of discrimination in the housing sphere;
- Adoption of legislation or policies clearly inconsistent with housing rights obligations, particularly when these result in homelessness, greater levels of inadequate housing, the inability of persons to pay for housing and so forth;
- Repealing legislation consistent with, and in support of, housing rights, unless obviously outdated or replaced with equally or more consistent laws;
- Unreasonable reductions in public expenditures on housing and other related areas, in the absence of adequate compensatory measures;
- Overtly prioritizing the housing interests of high-income groups when significant portions of society live without their housing rights having been achieved;

See the Appendix for the recent UN review of Canada's record of human rights compliance.

## Membership: Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

*The following individuals contributed to the drafting of the State of Emergency Declaration. The places they work or organizations they belong to are provided for identification purposes only.*

- David Hulchanski, Professor of Housing, U of Toronto
- Trevor Gray, AIDS ACTION NOW
- Brent Patterson, AIDS activist
- Beric German, Street Health AIDS outreach
- Maurice Adongo, Street Health mental health outreach
- Paula Dolezal, Street Health mental health outreach
- Peter Rosenthal, lawyer and U of Toronto Professor
- John Andras, co-founder of Project Warmth, Vice-President Research Capital Corp
- Cathy Crowe, RN, Queen West Community Health Centre, street outreach nurse
- Rev. Don (Dan) Heap (Anglican), former MP Trinity Spadina
- Jeannie Loughrey, Anglican priest, Diocese of Toronto
- Frank Showler, Member of Board of St. Claire's Inter-faith Housing
- David Walsh, President Realco Property Ltd
- Sherrie Golden, OCAP
- Sue Osborne, Housing Support Worker, Cornerstone Women's Residence

# Appendix

## Fact Sheets

- #1. City of Toronto, Council Strategy Committee on People without Homes, Presentation by Cathy Crowe, RN, May, 1998.
- #2. City of Toronto, The Homeless Crisis in Toronto, July 1998.
- #3. United Nations, On Canada's Human Rights Record, 1993 and 1998.
- #4. Ontario Coroner's Office, Verdict of the Inquest into the Freezing Deaths of Three Homeless Men in Toronto, 1996.
- #5. Government Expenditures on Housing
- #6. Studied to Death: Recent Reports on Toronto's Homeless



**Council Strategy Committee on  
People Without Homes**

May 11, 1998

Presentation to the Committee

**By Cathy Crowe, RN**

on behalf of the City of Toronto's Advisory Committee on  
Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today at your first meeting. I'm here today to outline why I believe that you should consider Toronto's crisis of homelessness a disaster for the purpose of receiving emergency federal relief.

In April I brought this concept to the Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons for several reasons.

First, our committee was formed in what I now, in retrospect, consider to have been the early stage of an acute disaster. Disasters, natural or man-made, are not restricted to countries in the tropics, but their consequences are similar. In late 1995-early 1996 our committee heard evidence on the following warning signs of impending crisis: serious overcrowding of our day and overnight shelter system, a 38% tuberculosis infection rate among the homeless, clusters of freezing deaths of homeless people, a rise in overall morbidity including malnutrition and the spread of infectious diseases and a rise in the number of homeless deaths.

Second, after 26 years of nursing in the inner city of Toronto, I now turn to disaster and relief effort literature to inform my nursing practice. For example, the most common health problems I see are related to trauma, tuberculosis transmission, spread of acute respiratory infection, hunger, malnutrition, diarrhoea and lice and more serious than any of the above, deprivation of the human spirit. Similar to a refugee camp.

Third, displaced persons suffer physically and emotionally - witness the impact of the emergency shelters on people in Eastern Canada during the ice storm. Although I considered offering assistance during the ice storm I faced a heart wrenching reality, in fact a shocking reminder - that people homeless in this city have been hit by a disaster, and many have been living a disaster for

up to ten years. New victims of the disaster, whether it be due to eviction, unemployment or family violence, face dismantled health and social supports, an emergency shelter system that is full and a society that blames them for even being there.

Finally, Council will eventually receive a report from the Golden Task Force. I must ask - does the City have the budgetary capacity to deal with any Task Force recommendations that have a significant cost associated with them? I suspect not. We need external financial relief now.

I believe I speak for many when I say that in early 1998 we have reached a point as a City and as front-line workers where we have to realize that we are failing miserably responding to this disaster. The homeless numbers are growing exponentially. As recently as Friday our committee heard of the expected shortfall of 2000 emergency hostel beds. As of last week, the system is full to capacity and in overflow mode for women and children. The reality is we are not in a position to solve this crisis on our own. Around the world, forced economic migration to large metropolises has led to similar crises around homelessness. In Europe and in the United States, federal funding has been put in place to respond to a national issue that has local ramifications. In Canada, Toronto is clearly in the most serious position with respect to homelessness. I believe that the City should seek emergency federal relief specifically to create low-cost housing and to develop emergency shelter that can adequately meet demands.

I would like to suggest the following recommendations to you.

1. That the committee begin its deliberations from the premise that homelessness has reached crisis proportions in the City of Toronto and is unsolvable without emergency federal or provincial relief.
2. That the committee request a staff report which would include: a) the various pieces of provincial and federal legislation which deal with emergency planning and or disaster relief; b) Canadian precedents whereby government relief was provided for shelter or housing such as the post World War II housing creation; c) analysis of the new City of Toronto Emergency by-law as to whether it provides the means to respond to the emergency needs (food, safety, shelter and health care) that face a significant proportion of the Toronto public who are homeless.
3. That the committee report to Council with recommendations on how to proceed with discussions with the federal and provincial governments on this matter.

Cathy Crowe, RN



**Commissioner of Community  
and Neighbourhood Services**

## **The Homeless Crisis in Toronto**

June 1998

From: Appendix II of *Homelessness and Request for a "Declaration of Disaster,"* report from the City of Toronto Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to the Council Strategy Committee for People Without Homes, Toronto, June 29, 1998.

Estimating the number of people who are homeless is difficult although we do know the number is rising. In 1997, about 28,000 people used the emergency shelter system in Toronto. People actually living on the street are growing in number according to street patrol and outreach workers. The number of "hidden homeless" i.e., people doubled up in housing or living in unstable or substandard housing and therefore at risk of becoming homeless, are even more difficult to estimate. At least 100,000 households with incomes below \$20,000 pay more than 30 percent. of their income on rent.

Toronto has experienced an increased demand for emergency shelter (usage has more than doubled in the last four years) along with accompanying shortages in supply. The system operates at full capacity most nights throughout the year with many hostels reporting overcrowding. While single adult men continue to comprise the majority of hostel users, trends show that mother-led families and youth are the fastest growing users of Toronto's hostel system.

In October 1997, Toronto's shelter system was unable to accommodate the expected demand for the upcoming winter. In response, several overnight and day shelters were opened, operating at full capacity most nights. These sites were designed as a temporary measure only. The closure of most of these sites and the Out of the Cold winter shelter programs at the end of May 1998, has left the hostel system once again dealing with a bed shortage. Hostel Services Division has made a concerted effort to accommodate for the loss of these beds by enhancing the bed capacity of some shelters and attempting to secure additional motel space.

Toronto's homeless crisis is also characterized by an increased demand for community-based emergency services such as drop-in centres and meal programs along with a proliferation and institutionalization of volunteer based, ad hoc responses such as the Out of the Cold winter shelter program and food banks.



**UNITED NATIONS  
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

***Reviewing Canada's Compliance in 1993***

by J.D. Hulchanski

In May 1993 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered Canada's report concerning its compliance with the human rights covered by Articles 10 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These articles cover rights associated with the family, women and children, an adequate standard of living, physical and mental health, education, and participation in cultural life.

Considering "Canada's enviable situation" with regard to available resources for the progressive realization of the rights recognized in the treaty, the Committee expressed "concern about the persistence of poverty in Canada" and the fact that there "seems to have been no measurable progress in alleviating poverty over the last decade, nor in alleviating the severity of poverty among a number of particularly vulnerable groups." It noted that "there seems to exist no procedure to ensure that those who must depend entirely on welfare payments do not thereby derive an income which is at or above the poverty line" and that there is widespread "hunger in Canada and the reliance on food banks operated by charitable organizations."

In terms of housing, the Committee noted "the omission from the Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness" and that "the Committee is surprised that expenditures on social housing are as low as 1.3 per cent of Government expenditures." The following are selections from the Committee's 1992 report on Canada.



*On no measurable progress in alleviating poverty:*

12. In view of the obligation arising out of article 2 of the Covenant to apply the maximum of available resources to the progressive realization of the rights recognized in the treaty, and considering Canada's enviable situation with regard to such resources, the Committee expresses concern about the persistence of poverty in Canada. There seems to have been no measurable progress in alleviating poverty over the last decade, nor in alleviating the severity of poverty among a number of particularly vulnerable groups.

*On the welfare rates which are below the poverty line:*

15. The Committee is concerned that there seems to exist no procedure to ensure that those who must depend entirely on welfare payments do not thereby derive an income which is at or above the poverty line.

*On the failure to address widespread housing discrimination:*

18. The Committee learned from non-governmental organizations of widespread discrimination in housing against people with children, people on social assistance, people with low incomes, and people who are indebted. Although prohibited by law in many of Canada's provinces, these forms of discrimination are apparently common. A more concerted effort to eliminate such practices would therefore seem to be in order.

*On the omission of any mention of the problems of homelessness:*

19. The Committee notes the omission from the Government's written report and oral presentation of any mention of the problems of homelessness. The Committee regretted that there were no figures available from the Government on the extent of homelessness, on the numbers of persons evicted annually throughout the country, on the lengths of waiting lists or the percentage of houses accessible to people with disabilities.

## ***Reviewing Canada's Compliance, November 1998***

Compliance with economic, social and cultural rights is reviewed every five years by the UN. In November 1998 Canadian government officials, as well as representatives from Canadian non-governmental organizations, such as the National Anti-poverty Organization (NAPO) and the Centre on Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA), will appear before the Committee again. The Committee has received Canada's 1998 report on compliance and on June 10, 1998, in preparation for the November hearings, sent the federal and provincial governments a long list of additional questions. These include several relating to housing and homelessness.

*Homelessness in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions*

41. Please provide any available data on the extent of homelessness in various cities in Canada. At what point would the Government consider homelessness in Canada to constitute a national emergency?

44. According to information provided to the Committee from Statistics Canada, the percentage of government expenditure on housing has declined since 1993. There has been extensive media coverage of a growing crisis of homelessness in Toronto, Vancouver and elsewhere, emphasizing primarily charity-based efforts to address the problems. Is the Government applying the "maximum of available resources" to eliminating homelessness and does it agree that guaranteeing the right to housing is a core responsibility of Governments and a matter of the highest priority?

55. The Committee understands that a high percentage of discharged psychiatric patients are ending up homeless. Please provide as accurate evidence as is available in relation to this problem and explain what is being done to address it.

56. Please provide any information available on the particular health problems of the homeless, including tuberculosis rates, and identify any barriers faced by the homeless in getting access to appropriate health care.

*Housing in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions*

42. Please provide information on any disparities between Aboriginal housing and other housing with respect to piped water, flush toilets, need for repairs and other indicators of adequacy.

43. At paragraph 275, the report states that federal funding for new social housing units was terminated in 1993. How can this be justified when so many households are unable to secure appropriate housing in the private market?

45. Could the Government of Ontario provide information as to how many households have been forced to move out or been evicted for non-payment of rent because of the cuts to social assistance?

46. The Committee understands that new legislation in Ontario will remove rent control on any apartment which is rented to a new tenant. Does the government of Ontario expect any additional increase in evictions because of this measure?

*Hunger and Food Banks in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions*

37. The Committee has received information that food bank use has continued to increase in Canada and has approximately doubled over the last 10 years. Can the Government explain why the number and use of food banks has continued to increase? Does the Government consider the need for food banks in so affluent a country as Canada consistent with article 11 of the Covenant?

38. Please provide information as to the number of people paying more than their shelter allowance for housing and indicate whether paying for housing out of money needed for food may lead to hunger in these households.

39. What proportion of children who use food banks go hungry and how often do parents go hungry?

*Income Assistance in Canada: 1998 United Nations Human Rights Questions*

16. Please indicate whether as a result of the repeal of the Canada Assistance Plan Act (CAP) by Bill C-76, people deprived of basic necessities under provincial or territorial social assistance schemes no longer have any legal recourse in federal law under the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST).

17. Why were the standards and entitlements maintained in health care but not in social assistance?

18. Have provinces responded by cutting social assistance rates or entitlements? Please provide information from each province about changes that have occurred from April 1995 to the present day, and any effect on the extent or depth of poverty.

19. To what extent does the revoking of CAP represent a retreat from the idea of financial assistance when in need as a universal entitlement, as described in previous reports to the Committee?

20. With respect to the negotiations by the Ministerial Council on Social Policy Reform and Renewal mentioned in paragraph 86 of the report, are the Federal and provincial Governments committed to restoring legal enforceability of the right to adequate financial assistance?

21. Describe any monitoring procedures established by Governments as well as non-governmental agencies to measure the effect of the 40 per cent (\$6 billion) cut in the amount of cash transferred by the Federal Government for social assistance, health and post-secondary education between April 1995 and the end of fiscal year 1992/2000. What common effects have become evident throughout Canada?

**Fact Sheet #4**



**Office of the Chief Coroner**

**Verdict of Coroner's Jury  
July 30, 1996**

**Inquest Into the Deaths of  
Eugene Uupper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani**

**OPENING REMARKS**

We the jury wish to express our condolences to the families of Eugene Uupper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah-Aldin Kompani. Cognizant of the plight of the three gentlemen who are the focus of this inquest and the many factors which may have contributed to their deaths such as addictions, mental illness, homelessness and cold harsh environment, we the jury have endeavoured to consider the aspects of the evidence presented to us.

We learned from the evidence that there is the growing problem of meeting the needs of a portion of our population who may have similar situations and circumstances as the three gentlemen aforementioned.

We have been admonished to weight the evidence impartially, laying no blame on anyone.

We then hope to present to all concerned our group effort achieved to the best of our ability to arrive at our verdict and recommendations.

Our goal is to bring about a workable solution to prevent further similar deaths if the present situation is allowed to continue.

We urge all levels of government and society at large to make a concerted and serious effort to alleviate the burden of this group of people to allow them to live in dignity.

We present these recommendations to achieve this goal.

**[Over fifty recommendations were made by the Jury. Virtually none of the recommendations relating to provincial and federal responsibilities has been implemented. In the areas of housing and social services there was a virtual denial from the responsible provincial ministers that they need to do anything. Even the provincial Coroner's Office made the minimum response to the jury's recommendation (#23) that a report be issued on the progress of implementation after six months. The Chief Coroner's response came on July 9, 1997, almost six months late. It is a simple summary of letters received. Recommendation #17, calling for an open truly representative process involving all levels of government in developing a plan of action has not been implemented.]**

**Inquest Recommendation 17: Housing Plan of Action**

Recommend an advisory committee be struck including representatives from all levels of government, private and non-profit landlords and housing developers, community organizations, tenants and homeless people.

The goal should be to identify successful models of affordable and supportive housing and community supports and develop a plan of action to ensure that the homeless, in particular those with substance abuse and/or mental illness, have access to appropriate housing and support services.

Funding should be provided by the appropriate governmental ministries to carry out this plan.

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For the full text of the Verdict of Coroner's Jury, go to:  
<http://www.raisingtheroof.org/raisetheroof/art1.htm>



## **National Legislation for Assisting the Homeless: A Comparison of Canada, the US and UK**

**From:** *Questions and Answers about Canada's Homeless.*

by J.D. Hulchanski, *Raising the Roof: Solutions for Canada's Homeless*, 1998.

A WWW document at: <http://www.raisingtheroof.org>

Canada does not have a national strategy for addressing the problem of homelessness. Unlike the United States and the United Kingdom, Canada has no national legislation and no national programs addressing the fact that many Canadians find themselves without housing for either short or long periods of time.

In the United States the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is a major federal legislative response to the problem. It was signed into law by President Reagan in July 1987, during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. (In contrast, the Canadian government held a conference in Ottawa.) The McKinney Act originally funded fifteen programs providing a range of services, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education and some permanent housing.

The McKinney Homeless Assistance Act has been amended four times (in 1988, 1990, 1992 and 1994). These amendments have, for the most part, expanded the scope and strengthened the provisions of the original legislation. In 1990, for example, the Shelter Plus Care program was established, which provides housing assistance to homeless people with disabilities, mental illness, AIDS, and drug or alcohol addiction. In 1992 the Rural Homeless Housing Assistance grant program and the Access to Community Care and Effective Services and Support (ACCESS) programs were created. In 1994 Congress amended the Education of the Homeless Children and Youth program and the Surplus Property Program.

Funding for McKinney Homeless Assistance Act programs has increased from US\$350 million in 1987 to \$1.5 billion in 1995. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that the Act has

created valuable programs that have saved lives and helped hundreds of thousands of Americans to regain housing stability. A 1995 evaluation concluded that the programs “have assisted significant numbers of homeless persons to regain independence and permanent housing and at a reasonable cost.” All the various evaluations, however, have noted that the resources allocated to the McKinney programs are insufficient to meet demand. In addition, the Act mainly funds emergency measures – a response to the symptoms not the causes.

In the United Kingdom the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act imposed the legal duty on municipal authorities to provide permanent housing for a variety of people in need. The legislation made a distinction between statutorily and non statutorily homeless people. Statutorily homeless households, following assessment by a municipal authority, qualify for permanent rehousing in public or non-profit social housing. The homeless households that qualify for assistance include people with dependent children, women who are pregnant and single people who are ‘vulnerable’, in that they cannot be expected to fend for themselves. In the UK, statutorily homeless households often have to wait for permanent social housing to become available. While statutorily homeless people are waiting in temporary accommodation (such as leased accommodation, and bed and breakfast hotels) for their permanent homes, they are still regarded as homeless.

Neither the U.S. nor the U.K. legislation are models for Canada. They are simply examples of the national level of government contributing to the effort to address the problem.

In 1990, when Finance Minister Paul Martin was an opposition Member of Parliament, he co-chaired a National Liberal Caucus Task Force on Housing. The report, *Finding Room: Housing Solutions for the Future* (May 1990), contains many excellent recommendations. One recommendation was the following:

*“The Task Force recommends that the Conservative government immediately convene a National Conference on the Homeless with participation from all levels of government, the non-profit sector and the private sector to set real objectives and policy responses for the eradication of homelessness in Canada. It is vital that the homeless play a significant role in this process. As well, the federal government must initiate discussions with provincial Ministries of Health and/or Community and Social Services to ensure that the immediate and long-term needs of the homeless are addressed.”* (page 18)

The press release which accompanied this fine 47 page analysis of Canada’s housing problems quotes Mr. Martin as complaining that the “federal government has abandoned its responsibilities with regards to housing problems” and that the “housing crisis is growing at an alarming rate and the government sits there and does nothing.” Mr. Martin added that “the lack of affordable housing contributes to and accelerates the cycle of poverty, which is reprehensible in a society as rich as ours.”

A number of members of *Raising the Roof* were consulted by Mr. Martin and his co-chair, M.P. Joe Fontana, back in 1990. We agreed with his recommendations back then and we continue to urge that they be implemented. Mr. Fontana, in that same May 14, 1990 press release, defines an appropriate role of the federal government, one which we fully concur with.

*“The federal government’s role would be that of a partner working with other levels of government, and private and public housing groups. But leadership must come from one source; and a national vision requires some national direction.”*



Fact Sheet #6

**Government Expenditure  
on Housing Programs:  
About 1% of Total Spending**

How much do Canadian governments spend on housing programs? Statistics Canada provides the following information on direct government expenditures on housing. This does not include indirect expenditures through the provision of special tax breaks (i.e., tax expenditures).

The total housing expenditures of the federal, provincial and local governments, as a percentage of all budget expenditures of these governments, in the 1994/95 fiscal year was: 1.07%.

**HOUSING EXPENDITURES AS A % OF:**

- **Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government expenditures**  
1994/95 = 1.07% (\$358 Billion total expenditures; \$3.83 Billion on housing)
- **Consolidated local government expenditures**  
1994 = 0.91% (\$72 Billion total expenditures; \$656 million on housing)  
1990 = 0.90%
- **Federal expenditures, 1991 to 1996**  
1995-96 = 1.14% (\$178 Billion total expenditures; \$2.03 Billion)  
1994-95 = 1.23%  
1993-94 = 1.25%  
1992-93 = 1.16%  
1991-92 = 1.14%
- **Provincial expenditures in 1996-97**

Ontario	1.20 %	Quebec	0.75 %
Nova Scotia	0.62 %	B.C.	0.29 %
Alberta	0.23 %	Sask.	0.22 %
Manitoba	0.15 %	Others	0.00 %

Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM (available at: [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca))

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### Fact Sheet #7

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