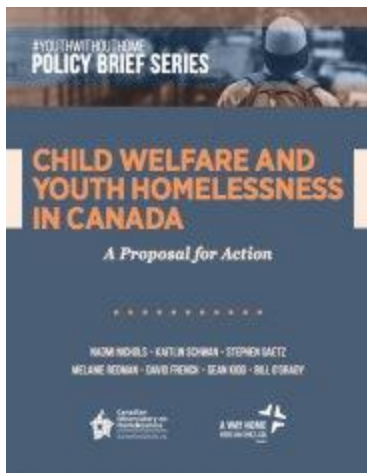


Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness in Canada: A Proposal for Action

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With the release of [Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey](#) (2016), we now have robust national data on the links between youth homelessness and child welfare involvement. Without a Home, conducted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness in partnership with A Way Home Canada, surveyed 1,103 youth experiencing homelessness across Canada. Youth in 42 different communities and nine of the 10 Canadian provinces, as well as Nunavut Territory, completed the self-report survey. The results provide the first national picture of youth homelessness in Canada.

Without a Home's findings on child welfare involvement were striking. Almost sixty percent (57.8%) of homeless youth in Canada report involvement with the child welfare system at some point in their lives. In comparison, among the general population in Canada, roughly 0.3% of youth have child welfare involvement. This suggests that youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely than youth in the general population to report involvement with the child welfare system.

Youth participants described many different forms of involvement with the child welfare system (e.g., investigations, voluntary supervision and/ or care agreements, and non-voluntary custody and care orders). Youth also reported interactions with the system at different times in their lives. On average, young people reported initial encounters with the child welfare system at 8.5 years of age and the termination of the relationship at 12.5 years of age. Close to a third of the study respondents (31.5%) reported that involvement began before the age of 6, and just over half (53%) reported that they were still involved with the child welfare system beyond the age of 16.

Despite variations in policy and service-provision across the country, we know that youth in—and leaving—state care experience disproportionately negative outcomes in several domains, including: housing, education, employment, criminal-legal system involvement, and overall health and wellness. Foster care involvement, in particular, is associated with a number of intersecting issues for young people: housing instability and homelessness, academic underperformance, poor mental and physical health, underemployment, and interactions with the criminal-legal system during and after care.

The results of Without a Home indicate that young people who have been involved in the child welfare system are vulnerable to homelessness and housing insecurity. To address this important finding, we have proposed a number of evidence-based recommendations that reflect our commitment to human rights and equity. These recommendations are intended to provide better support for young people in care, and to ensure that they are able to successfully transition from care in ways that ensure housing stability, access to supports, and well-being. The recommendations are directed at the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, and child protection services and workers. The content of the recommendations are drawn from and build upon a broad range of resources from Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario) and Europe (Scotland, FEANTSA).

FROM THE RESEARCH MATTERS BLOG

[Child Welfare and Homelessness in Canada: Who is Responsible?](#)

ORGANIZATION: A Way Home Canada, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

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