

# Homeless Guidelines News

Volume 1, Issue 1 April 2018



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## What is the Homeless Health Network?

The Homeless Health Network is a group of researchers and healthcare providers who are developing homeless health guidelines for Canada. Homeless health guidelines are a set of evidence-based recommendations on how to best address the needs of homeless and vulnerably housed populations in Canada. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates on the guideline development process. The goal is to create a strong voice that will change how Canada provides health and social care to homeless and vulnerably housed people.

**OUR GOAL IS TO MEET THE HEALTHCARE NEEDS OF HOMELESS AND VULNERABLY HOUSED POPULATIONS**



## Developing Evidence-Based Guidelines

The Inner City Health Associates (ICHA) is funding the Homeless Health Network to develop Canadian homeless health guidelines. These guidelines will help policymakers and health professionals better address the health and social needs of homeless and vulnerably housed people in Canada.

### The ICHA has four simple goals:

- To end chronic homelessness related to illness and disability while improving access to care for the homeless population
- To promote collaboration amongst service providers
- To promote a standard of excellence in the provision of homeless health care
- To advocate for and address health needs from a holistic perspective

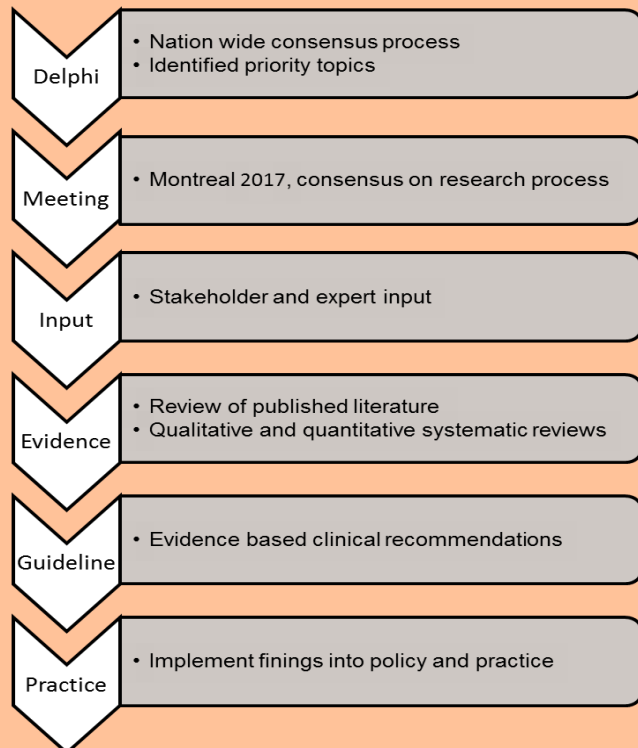
**The ICHA is moving Canada closer to the possibility of better health support for those experiencing homelessness by funding the development of Homeless Health Guidelines.**



Image source: <http://www.icha-toronto.ca/who-we-are/mission-and-leadership>

# The Guideline Development Process

The Homeless Health Network is using a six-step process to create the Homeless Health Guidelines. They began by asking healthcare practitioners and people with lived homeless experience to give their input on the development process. This information will help to determine what issues and populations need to be studied before making suggestions on how to address them. The Network then hosted a working group meeting in Montreal with individuals with lived homeless experience and health professionals to learn more about health-related issues affecting homeless individuals in Canada. This meeting allowed participants to give their input on the topics most important to them. Next, the Network will review existing research to find out what information already exists about these topics. They will also look at the values, attitudes and preferences of prioritized homeless populations. The final step will be to use this information to create guidelines in Canada.



## Engaging with the Community

An important part of the guideline development process is engaging with those who are affected most by homelessness. In 2017, The Homeless Health Network met with a variety of individuals working in the sector of homeless health care and also those who were formerly homeless. They helped identify the key issues and populations that the Guidelines should help to address. Christine Lalonde, part of the Network’s Community Scholar Program, tells us why this work is important to her:

*I am currently a frontline peer support worker. In my younger years, I worked as a nurse and lived through periods of homelessness and other undesirable*

*circumstances like substance use, violence, abuse and criminalization. All of these experiences have enabled me, however, to help others experiencing the burden of homelessness through my involvement in harm reduction programs and collaborating with research initiatives.*

*My goals in joining this project are to provide a different perspective as someone who has actually struggled and scrambled through the maze of not having a home, experiencing stigma and not knowing what resources were available out there to help me. I want to remind others that the client or patient’s personal goals are always a priority, which can sometimes be overlooked by clinicians. **People centered care is about just that, the person.***

- Christine Lalonde

## Prioritizing Issues and Populations

People experiencing homelessness in Canada face a long list of barriers and challenges to their health and well-being. There are also specific groups within the homeless population that face unique challenges. As part of the guideline development process, the Homeless Health Network consulted healthcare workers and people with lived homeless experience across Canada to identify the four top issues that the homeless health guidelines should focus on. They also helped identify which parts of the homeless population the guidelines should focus on.

### Top 4 issues to prioritize

- Facilitating access to housing
- Mental health and addiction care
- Care coordination/case management
- Facilitating access to income

### Top 4 populations to prioritize

- Indigenous peoples
- Women
- Youth
- People with disabilities

## Understanding the Challenges Facing Homeless and Vulnerably-Housed Women

Women who are homeless or vulnerably housed face a set of challenges that are different than those facing men. They often face intimate partner violence or substandard housing conditions due to overcrowding. Women with children are less likely to live on the street but may “couch surf” or rely on temporary housing with friends or relatives. Because of this, it is important to connect these women to effective resources or interventions. According to Dr. Anne Andermann (MD), creating safe spaces for disclosure is a necessary first step toward safe and stable housing, employment, family stability and mental wellness. In these spaces, women can openly speak about their living conditions without fear of stigma. This will help them feel empowered and become independent once again.

Dr. Andermann is a family physician and associate professor in the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal. Her work revolves around helping frontline health workers address the social causes of poor health through a combination of direct patient care, referrals, and wider social change.

### Leading Risk Factors for Women in Unstable Housing



- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Family Instability
- Personal/family crisis

## Learning what we Don't Know

An important step in the guideline development process is finding out what research exists about the topics we need to cover. For this, The Homeless Health Network is using an Evidence and Gap Map (EGM), which is a way of accomplishing this goal. This map tells us where we need to do more research in order to make better-informed decisions about healthcare. Policy makers are able to use EGMs to make informed judgements and evidence-based decisions when creating policies.

The Homeless Health Network, in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada, is developing an EGM on the topic of women experiencing homelessness. They hope it will give them a sense of what research has been done and where they need to do more research in the future.

## Engaging Medical Students

Medical students are playing a key role in identifying core objectives and competencies to guide development in shaping the future of homeless healthcare. They are exposed to key social determinants of health and medical trainees, as well as provide how they are confounded by integral more perspective regarding lived environmental factors such as issues surrounding homelessness, housing, food access, safety, and community supports. In translating knowledge into practice, it is important to encourage more first-hand exposure and interaction with populations that are in need.

The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) is a platform for medical students to advocate for their learning and communities. Recently, the CFMS Task Force of Homelessness was banded together to increase awareness of this topic, with a focus



## Recent Research in Homeless Health

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### Collaborating Partners

Public Health Agency of  
Canada  
The Canadian Task Force  
Inner City Health Associates  
Canadian Federation of  
Medical Students  
The College of Family  
Physicians Canada  
Registered Nurses  
Association of Ontario  
Public Health Ontario  
Health Quality Ontario  
Employment and Social  
Development Canada  
Calgary Urban Project Society  
Centre for Addiction and  
Mental Health (ON)  
Klinik Community Health  
(MB)  
Vancouver Native Health  
Society Clinic  
The Working Center (ON)  
Multicaf (QC)

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