



20,000 Homes Campaign
Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness
Question and Answer Document

Updated
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INTRODUCTION

The 20,000 Homes Campaign (20KHomes) has identified a goal to end chronic homelessness in 20 communities across Canada by July 1, 2020. The 20KHomes Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness Q&A provides answers to commonly asked questions about functional zero chronic homelessness as it relates to the 20KHomes Campaign. This document is primarily intended for 20KHomes communities and complements other information included on the [20KHomes](#) website. This document will continue to be updated as needed to further clarify information and/or to include additional questions.

Questions are answered below under the headings of:

- Homelessness Definition
- Chronic Homelessness Definitions
- Ending Chronic Homelessness Definitions
- 20KHomes and Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Homelessness Definition

1. What is the Canadian definition of homelessness?

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness created the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#) in 2012 and updated it in 2017. In this document homelessness is defined as, “the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.”. The definition document also describes a typology of homelessness that includes 1) unsheltered, 2) emergency sheltered, 3) provisionally accommodated, and 4) at risk of homelessness. **This definition** has been largely adopted across Canada and **has been adopted by 20KHomes**.

Chronic Homelessness Definitions

2. What is the Federal Government’s current definition of chronic homelessness?

Through the [HPS Directive 2014-2019](#): have defined as, “Chronically homeless refers to individuals, often with disabling conditions (e.g. chronic physical or mental illness, substance abuse problems), who are currently homeless and have been homeless for six months or more in the past year (i.e., have spent more than 180 cumulative nights in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation)”. **This definition that has been adopted by 20KHomes**.

3. What are provincial definitions of chronic homelessness?

Some provinces may not have definitions. Those provinces that do have a definition of chronic homelessness have either adopted the Canadian federal definition or have more closely aligned with the US definition.

For example, Ontario's [A Place To Call Home: Report Of The Expert Advisory Panel On Homelessness](#) (October 2015), "Recommendation #2: The Province adopt the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy definition for 'chronic homelessness'." Which was then included in the Homeless section of the [Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update](#) (2016).

[Alberta Human Services - Definitions of Homelessness \(2012\)](#): Chronic Homelessness "Those who have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter".

4. What is the US definition of chronic homelessness?

The US federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released a new definition effective January 2016 which can be summarized as, "To be considered chronically homeless, a person must have a disability and have been living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or a safe haven for the last 12 months continuously or on at least four occasions in the last three years where those occasions cumulatively total at least 12 months".

(<http://www.csh.org/2015/12/hud-defines-chronically-homeless/>)

Ending Chronic Homelessness Definitions

5. Where is the Canadian federal government at in defining an end to chronic homelessness?

The federal government does not currently have a definition for ending chronic homelessness.

Announced as part of the 2017 budget, the federal government identified its interest in halving chronic homelessness as part of the new National Housing Strategy as recorded by The Star:

- Government estimates peg the number of chronic and episodic homeless at 25,000, meaning the Liberals expect that 11 years from now, federal spending will have cut that number to 12,500. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/04/22/liberals-aim-to-cut-homelessness-by-50-per-cent-with-new-reduction-targets.html>
- In The Star Opinion article by Adam Vaughan (parliamentary secretary to the minister of Families, Children and Social Development) and Jean-Yves Duclos (minister of Families, Children and Social Development and minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) reiterate aim to cut chronic homelessness in half <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/05/04/canadas-renewed-commitment-to-housing.html>.

This interest in reducing chronic homelessness by 50% was confirmed when [Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home](#) was released in November 2017.

The federal government is currently measuring chronic homelessness through two venues. The first is the voluntary national coordinated Point-in-Time Counts (e.g., 2016 and 2018) in which one of the core questions is related to chronicity "In total, how much time have you been homeless over the past year? [Best estimate], Length _____ days/weeks/months, Don't know, Decline to answer". The second way is through the [National Shelter Study 2005-2014](#) using period prevalence data through the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS).

In addition, they have funded the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy Innovation Fund for the "Making Zero Count: Defining an End to Homelessness" project (see further information in Question #6).

6. Where is the national conversation at in defining an end to chronic homelessness?

Over the last two years, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), the University of Calgary School of Public Policy (SPP), and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) have supported a collaborative process to develop a definition of what it means to end homelessness in Canada (broadly – not necessarily specific to chronic homelessness).

In the summer of 2016, the COH launched a consultation to seek feedback on a proposed definition of ending homelessness found in the working paper "[Discerning 'Functional Zero': Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada](#)". See also this [blog post](#) from Alina Turner (University of Calgary; Turner Research & Strategy Inc.) from May 2016. Based on feedback, the [Canadian Definition of Ending Homelessness](#) was released in early 2017 which included the following definitions for "functional zero" and "absolute zero":

- **Functional End** - A Functional Zero end to homelessness means that communities have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness (unsheltered homeless, sheltered homeless, provisionally accommodated or imminent risk of homelessness) is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.
- **Absolute End** - Absolute Zero refers to a true end to homelessness, where everyone has access to supports and appropriate housing so that no one becomes homeless (unsheltered homeless, sheltered homeless, or provisionally accommodated) or at risk in the first place.

From 2017-2019, the COH "Making Zero Count: Defining an End to Homelessness" project seeks to further develop, create tools, and test the current definition. An Advisory Board has been formed to support the process. Project activities include hosting an Indigenous Roundtable in conjunction with the 2017 National Conference on Ending Homelessness and working with seven communities to further develop the definition and tools, from which two of these seven communities will pilot the tools and test the definition.

In December 2017, Ange Neil posted this [blog](#) entitled "A Lived Experience View of Functional and Absolute Zero". Also in December 2017, Stephen Gaetz, Melanie Redman and Alina Turner released their own position paper through the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, "[Defining](#)

[and Measuring An End To Homelessness: Considerations for the National Housing Strategy](#)". The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness through 20KHomes has offered an alternate and specific definition for a functional end to chronic homelessness (see Q8.3 below).

7. Where are the Provinces at in defining an end to chronic homelessness?

Ontario identified a goal of ending chronic homelessness in 10 years (by 2025) in its [Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update](#) (2016). Ontario then passed regulations in the fall of 2016 and released [Guidelines for Service Manager Enumeration](#) in March 2017 requiring service managers to enumerate homelessness every two years beginning in spring 2018. One of the core enumeration questions required by the Province will measure chronic homelessness: "In total, how much time have you been homeless over the past year? [Best estimate], Length _____ days/weeks/months, Don't know, Decline to answer". The Province does not currently have a definition for ending chronic homelessness but is participating on the Advisory Committee for the Making Zero Count project mentioned in question #5.

8. Does anyone have a definition for an end to chronic homelessness?

Three groups have clear measures:

- 1) **The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness** - [Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Chronic Homelessness](#)

- 2) [Built for Zero](#) - as described in picture to the right. Definition aligns with USICH definition above. Focused on single adults only.

See this short [video](#) from Community Solutions that explains the concept of a By-Name List and functional zero (while based on the definition for ending veteran's homelessness – it is still helpful in understanding the concepts).

The Definition of Functional Zero Chronic in US

≤ [0.1% of your most recent total homeless individual PIT Count] * OR [3 people]

*Whichever is greater Sustained for 3 months

<https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/criteria-and-benchmarks-for-ending-chronic-homelessness/>

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

- 3) [20KHomes](#) – as described in picture to the right. Definition adapted from Built for Zero definition above. Based on individuals (focussed on single adults and youth but communities could also choose to include individuals in families). Goal to reach a functional end to chronic homelessness in 20 communities by July 1, 2020.

20,000 HOMES

The 20KHomes Definition
Functional End to Chronic Homelessness

We will begin with a measure for achieving a functional end to chronic homelessness (functional zero chronic homelessness) described below:

20,000 HOMES CAMPAIGN

chronic homelessness accounts for 3 or less people as measured by your quality By-Name List*

or

For larger communities with more than 4,000 actively homeless on their By-Name List-chronic homelessness accounts for less than 0.1% of your actively homeless as measured by your quality By-Name List*

* Must be sustained for three consecutive months

Once functional zero is achieved, communities will work to sustain and reduce to absolute zero on chronic homelessness and expand to new populations. CAEH

20KHomes and Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness

9. Why has 20KHomes adopted this definition of functional zero chronic homelessness? (see Q#8.3 above)

This is an outcome-focussed definition that is simple to measure, easy to understand, and can be consistently applied across communities based on real-time and reliable data through a [quality By-Name List](#). When communities achieve functional zero chronic homelessness based on this definition, it provides a strong indicator that their local system is functioning effectively to prevent and end chronic homelessness.

10. Why is the 20KHomes Campaign aiming for functional zero on chronic homelessness rather than absolute zero?

The 20,000 Homes Campaign will support communities to reach absolute zero on chronic homelessness. However, a measure of functional zero chronic homelessness is identified as the initial goal as it recognizes:

- Chronic homelessness has historically comprised anywhere from 5%-20% of many community's homelessness population. Reducing chronic homelessness to 0.1% of the homeless population or three or less people and sustaining that number for three or more months demonstrates significant progress in designing a local system that ensures chronic homelessness is rare, brief and non-reoccurring.

- Inflow onto a community's chronic homeless By-Name List may be somewhat unpredictable. Despite a community's best efforts, they may not be able to identify, engage and house someone within the month. These situations may include someone moving from another community, being discharged from an institution without sufficient notice or planning, or someone unexpectedly losing their housing.
- Sometimes it takes significant time to engage and build trust with someone who is experiencing chronic homelessness or to engage additional community partners to provide the appropriate level of support.

11. Have any communities achieved functional zero on chronic homelessness?

Currently, three communities in the United States have been confirmed through Built for Zero and the federal government as ending chronic homelessness including: Bergen County, New Jersey; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Rockford, Illinois.

No community in Canada has yet been confirmed through 20KHomes as achieving functional zero on chronic homelessness. Progress in this area is being tracked on the [20KHomes website](#).

12. What happens if a community achieves functional zero chronic homelessness and then their numbers increase again?

Once a community is confirmed as having reached functional zero on chronic homelessness they move into the work of sustaining those gains. Sustaining requires continued commitment and on-going system improvements to respond to ever-changing community dynamics. While it is possible that a community's numbers will fluctuate in the sustaining phase, they do not lose their status as having achieved functional zero on chronic homelessness.

13. What definition of chronic homelessness is being used in 20KHomes?

20KHomes follows the federal definition of chronic homelessness (see Q#2). However, given the aim of 20KHomes is to house the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness, communities are encouraged to focus on housing people who are chronically homeless as well as those with the highest acuity.

If communities in Alberta are only able to produce data based on the Alberta definition of chronic homelessness (see Q#3), they may continue to do so, noting this in their data submission.

14. What happens if the Government of Canada or the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) changes their definition of "chronic homelessness"?

The 20,000 Homes Campaign uses the federal definition of chronic homelessness and would work to align with any new federal definition if it changes.

15. What happens if the results of the Making Zero Count project (mentioned in question #5 and #6), planned to be released in 2019, have a different or expanded definition(s) from the 20KHomes definition (identified in question #8.3) for measuring an end to chronic homelessness?

20KHomes will review and consider the results in consultation with Campaign communities and other stakeholders to decide how to move forward with a definition for ending chronic homelessness for the purposes of the 20KHomes Campaign to July 1, 2020. The question would be considered again for any plans beyond July 1, 2020.