



**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

## 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.

### 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)”.

#### **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.

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, 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](#)". See also this [blog post](#) from Ange Neil from December 2017 entitled "A Lived Experience View of Functional and Absolute Zero".

## **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.

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 (focused 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:

 ≤ [ 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 also be sustained for three consecutive months

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

20,000 HOMES CAMPAIGN

CAEH

**9. 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 continue to align with the federal definition if it changes.

**10. 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) 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 then be considered again for any plans beyond July 1, 2020.