

Youth Homelessness and Its Challenges for Those with Invisible Disorders

Overview

Youth homelessness remains a critical social issue across Canada. Many young people who experience homelessness have faced early life challenges, including trauma, instability, and adverse conditions that undermine their ability to maintain safe and stable housing later in life. Understanding the causes, patterns, and health implications of youth homelessness—particularly for those with invisible disorders—is essential for creating effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Key Insights

- 1. Early and Chronic Homelessness:** 44% of respondents first experienced homelessness before age 25. The earlier homelessness begins, the greater the likelihood of chronic homelessness later in life. 58% of youth respondents experienced chronic homelessness (6+ months in the past year), up from 53% in 2018.
- 2. Causes of Housing Loss:** 51% of youth reported interpersonal conflict or abuse as the main cause of housing loss, compared to 31% among older groups. Financial issues and unsafe housing conditions followed as other main causes.
- 3. Health and Invisible Disorders:** Youth were more likely to report learning or cognitive limitations, mental health challenges, and substance use issues (56%). These invisible disorders often go untreated, creating barriers to housing and stability.
- 4. Youth in Care:** Youth with experiences in child welfare were overrepresented among the homeless, especially hidden homelessness (39%). They were more likely to report cognitive disabilities (61% higher), substance use (29% higher), and mental health issues (25% higher).
- 5. Demographic Insights:** Higher representation of women, 2SLGBTQI+, and Indigenous youth among those experiencing homelessness. Many first experienced homelessness earlier in life.

Conclusion

Youth homelessness is deeply intertwined with invisible disorders, trauma histories, and systemic inequities. Early intervention, trauma-informed services, and inclusive supports tailored for youth with mental health conditions, cognitive disabilities, or substance use issues are crucial. Recognizing and addressing invisible disorders is essential to breaking this cycle and fostering safe, sustainable housing and wellbeing.