



PROJECT COMMUNIQUÉ

Hidden Homelessness in Rural and Northern Ontario

The Rural Ontario Institute has commenced a research study to explore hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario. The study will identify promising local strategies that are responding to this issue and will include interviews with individuals with “lived experience” of homelessness in rural and northern settings. The project is being sponsored under the Province’s Municipal Research and Analysis Grant.

On October 28, 2015, the Province released the report from the **Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness**. The Panel’s report, *A Place to Call Home*, acknowledges that homelessness is complex, and that progressive action is required to address it. Within the report, hidden homelessness is identified as an important issue – and a challenge to measure. The Report notes: *“Approaches to counting people who are homeless in big cities – such as street counts – may not work in small urban, rural, and northern contexts where hidden homelessness is more common.”*

The causes of homelessness in rural and northern Ontario are often the same as in big cities: poverty, mental illness and addictions, inadequate/precarious housing and domestic violence. However, there are unique dynamics related to homelessness in rural and northern settings, including geographic distance, lack of services and cyclical resource-based economies. This research study aims to explore these unique realities.

The ‘hidden homelessness’ population includes people who live in temporary, provisional accommodation, or in a situation that is not sustainable. It refers to people who generally do not pay rent, live temporarily with others and do not have the ability to secure their own permanent housing immediately or in the near future. This population is considered to be ‘hidden’ because they usually do not access homeless supports and services, even though they are improperly or inadequately housed. Because they do not access services they often are not reflected in standard statistics on homelessness.

A research team has been formed which will review current homelessness strategies, talk to service managers (Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards) and service providers and interview individuals who have experienced homelessness in rural and northern settings.

The Rural Ontario Institute is providing overall management and coordination for the project to ensure project activities are carried out effectively and successfully.

Members of the research team include:

- Fay Martin, Project Manager
- Carol Kauppi, Laurentian University
- Bill O’Grady, University of Guelph
- Rebecca Schiff, Lakehead University
- Petra Wolfbeiss , Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

In addition, an advisory group of other experts will be established to assist the research team with project planning and implementation.

The 15-month project will be completed by March 2017 with a report made available to the Province and rural and northern stakeholders.

The report is anticipated to help gain a better understanding of people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in rural and northern settings. It is also expected to help service managers and service providers learn about “best practices” underway in communities across the province.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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