

Summary Report of Table Discussions at the Indigenous Homelessness Pre-Conference Summit Winnipeg, Manitoba October 24th, 2017

Background

On October 24th, 2017 a half-day pre-conference summit on Indigenous homelessness sought to engage participants in a facilitated and interactive process that involved keynote speakers, panel presentations, and roundtable group works. The focus was on defining Indigenous homelessness, linking Indigenous homelessness to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action, and aligning homelessness work at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

Three hundred participants took part in the summit. Almost 60 percent (n=176) of participants were from outside Manitoba. The summit agenda for the event is presented in Appendix A. Roundtable discussions sought to gather knowledge from the circle (participants). Students from Urban Circle Training Centre and Red River College served as note takers for the round table discussions. Their detailed notes documented themes and comments arising from the discussions.

This report reflects a summary of common themes that were identified from the round table discussions, in addition to statements and understandings of the attendees regarding the presentations made during the summit.

Summit Presentations:

- Moving from Definition to Action: Canadian National Indigenous Homelessness Definition
- Homelessness and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reflections and Actions to Reconcile our Relationships with Indigenous People
- Aligning Homelessness Work at Federal, Provincial, and Local Levels: Panel Presentation

Round Table Discussions

At the outset, each table group at the event was encouraged to reflect upon an introductory question that asked:

Having heard from our speakers and panel presenters, take a few moments to share what was important in what you heard. Think about the dimensions of the Canadian Indigenous Homelessness definition that was presented today. How can this Indigenous definition be used to address homelessness in your community?

In addition to the introductory question, several guiding questions were provided to participants. These questions included:

1. What do you think are the barriers and impacts at the local level/community? Was there an issue that was not discussed by the presenters/panel?

2. How do you think the principles and strategies discussed help to end Indigenous homelessness?
3. How do you think these strategies (panel presenter thoughts) align?
4. What needs to be done to strengthen the strategies undertaken at various levels?
5. How can non-Indigenous communities be allies?

Each table group was free to choose which, if any, of the guiding questions they wished to discuss.

At the end of the round table session, each table was asked to ponder the following question:

Of all the things we've discussed today, what would be the priorities that need to be addressed moving forward, on how to implement the Canadian Indigenous Homelessness Definition and the issues presented today?

Discussion Synopsis¹

There was tremendous overlap and iterative discussion regarding the questions posed to participants and not all questions were addressed by each table. As a result, responses to questions 1, 3 and 5 are presented in this report as well as key recommendations.

Introductory Question: How Can the Indigenous Definition of Homelessness Be Used in Your Community?

Healing was one of the most commonly cited issues. Trauma, colonization, mental health, addictions, dislocation and loss of culture were all discussed as significant contributors to feelings of helplessness among those trapped in homelessness.

Systemic racism and the historical silencing and disrespect of Indigenous voices were raised several times. Participants noted the importance of being aware of Indigenous roles and voices to ensure all were considered.

"Indigenous voices needed on panels, in government, and all other spheres of life to make sure you're not missing anything. Anything from an Indigenous perspective will be all encompassing"
– table discussion

One of the most common themes was the desire for people with lived experience to have a greater impact on policy and program development. People with lived experience need to be heard. Several table groups suggested the need to listen to those with lived experience before changing policies and or programs. This point was mentioned and reinforced several times.

¹ The responses and comments presented here reflect a non-judgemental summary of Summit participants' comments and discussions. Views and comments are not meant to be construed as endorsements for, nor supported by, End Homelessness Winnipeg.

“People with lived experience know what needs to be done, listen to them”

– table discussion

Several table discussions touched upon the importance of having people with lived experience on staff within organizations that are working with individuals experiencing homeless. A common theme was the desire and need for staff in service-providing agencies and government offices to have experience and increased understanding of the value brought by people with lived experience. Discussion at some tables suggested the desire to pay homeless people for their experience and wisdom.

Question 1: What Do You Think the Barriers Are?

Discussion of barriers and their impact received the most attention during the round table session. These discussions were both broad and deep.

A common theme was the need to educate service providers on Indigenous concepts of homelessness, especially those who are non-Indigenous. A similar theme raised by several groups was the need for service providers to be better educated to deal with, respect and not look down upon clients experiencing homelessness.

How do service providers help individuals who are experiencing homelessness to become stronger, rather than disempowered and dependent? This idea, although not stated in the same way seemed to emerge across many of the table groups. One group specifically addressed the idea of changing from a need-based approach to an asset-based approach.

The lack of adequate, affordable housing was a common theme. Housing shortages (both in rural First Nations communities and in urban centres) was raised by several groups. In addition to the lack of housing, limited mental health programs and addictions programs and child welfare services were all themes which received considerable attention and discussion.

A neglect in health care, especially mental health was noted several times. Mothers being treated differently by service agencies if they are Indigenous was noted at several tables. There was a general sense that many people are suffering and feeling lost, with no direction or collaborative system-wide supports for families.

“There is a general disconnect between government and the people it serves”

– table discussion

Bureaucracy (at all levels including First Nations governments) was a common issue with substantial discussion across multiple tables and multiple questions. A common discussion topic was that governments are not listening and that governments / bureaucrats should listen and learn rather than just follow protocols. Bureaucratic rules were raised often among several discussion groups. It was felt bureaucratic definitions of homelessness often don't align, and people fall through the cracks. Several groups indicated that layers of complexity regarding homelessness requires a multi-sectoral approach to resolve.

One table noted “intersectionality” was not discussed by the presenters.² Nor were steps discussed which could be taken at an individual level. Participants felt everyone needs to be part of the circle to make a difference.

Several groups noted non-government organizations (NGOs) working in the homelessness sector are being asked to do more work outside of this scope, which sometimes takes away from their work on homelessness. The concern is that NGOs are not large enough to handle these new duties. Many felt municipalities need to do more.

Organizations competing against each other for funding was a frequently cited issue. So too was the need to get funding from multiple funding sources to run needed programs. Funders’ expectations can be constricting, leaving little time to build relationships before results are expected. There was also concern that non-Indigenous organizations were ‘taking’ funding from Indigenous programs. More and or adequate, stable funding for programs, services and education was raised at several tables.

“Funding requirements force the ‘survival’ mode in organizations. They change services every so often because of the shifts in the funding priorities.”

– table discussion

The issue of private sector (corporate / business) responsibility and relationship with the Indigenous community was raised several times. Businesses could be an alternative funding stream. How does this process of connecting with the private sector get started and how do communities reach out?

The theme of relations between First Nations and urban communities was prominently reflected in the discussions. System-wide supports are required to help First Nations individuals overcome the disconnection they experience when coming to the city. A commonly cited theme among round table discussions was the need to assist Indigenous students who are coming to large urban centres with integration into city life.

Further, more resources for all people coming from First Nations communities to the city was also touched upon by several tables. The issue of displacement, especially to urban centres where poverty tends to be more extreme was raised. Understanding the systems and services available for people moving from First Nations communities to urban centres remains a challenge. The need for education and awareness through the school system, prior to city resettlement was a theme amongst many groups. Some table groups noted that Friendship Centres do not have adequate facilities and funding to support newcomers to the city.

Question 3: How Do Strategies Align?

Few group discussions reflected on the panel presentations and the question of alignment amongst the strategies to end homelessness that were presented, although one group did note the discussions lead to reflection on what is not being done well by government. There was recognition that jurisdictional

² Intersectionality is defined as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group regarding or creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

alignment is needed at all levels of government, both on and off reserve. An example is Jordan's Principle. Other groups noted environmental issues and access issues such as winter roads.

Further, there remains a lack of understanding of Indigenous issues. More conversations are required, with the Indigenous community as leaders in the process. At one group discussion it was stated that all Indigenous people are different, therefore we cannot put the same stamp on all Indigenous people and communities.

Question 5: How Can Non-Indigenous Communities Be Allies?

As noted during several discussions, lack of communication and awareness remains an issue. In turn, lack of trust and understanding creates divisions among possible allies. One group specifically noted Indigenous groups do not want people to do things for them, they want people to work with them not for them.

A theme noted at several tables was that racism should be acknowledged and addressed. However, many people from a variety of cultures want to learn and help. There is the need and opportunity to create allies with those people. Focusing on education and prevention as well as broader goals to inform, discuss, rethink, and come together were common themes. Understanding the impacts of colonialism is key to building true allies.

"Do not do things for us without consultation"

– table discussion

The need to tell the history of Residential Schools to students in schools was noted several times. It is challenging when Indigenous people are told to just "get over it". It will take a long time to heal and the "get over it" attitude is unhelpful. This point was raised at several tables. A further theme noted was the need to ensure newcomers to Canada (immigrants and refugees) receive education on Indigenous history.

Spreading the word about issues such as missing and murdered Indigenous women and lateral violence was mentioned at several tables. One group noted that if the conversation stops, it will be perceived that the issue is no longer present.

"Healing is a process and it is labour intensive"

– table discussion

Recommendations Arising from the Discussions

The summit was designed to identify Indigenous-centered recommendations for action. The responses from the round table discussions reveal a clear message that resonates with a desire to move forward at all levels on the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Key recommendations are highlighted below:

- Continue discussions on rights-based definitions of homelessness

- The definition presented was very comprehensive yet adaptable, allowing for these discussions. As one table group noted, “Jessie and Althea are beginning the work.”
- Broaden the understanding of Indigenous homelessness beyond the colonial context
 - An Indigenous definition of homelessness should be about connections rather than whether someone is housed
 - Change the perspective from individual to community responsibility
 - The “All My Relations” perspective is a key for people to feel connected to their community beyond just having a home
 - Give the 12 dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness more consideration

“Look at relationships and social networks; homelessness is not only about a physical structure. Nothing works until you address connectedness”

– table discussion

- Build or rebuild bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. For example;
 - More access to ceremonies, medicines and culture
 - Engage elders, seek their guidance and implement as directed
 - Increase community conversations and opportunities for networking and creative ways to share cultures
 - Reconnect people to their land, family, ancestors and culture

“The blanket exercise should be done across many platforms, especially for service providers”

– table discussion

- Increase awareness and knowledge of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to inform housing and support policies in Manitoba
- Rethink what reconciliation is and whether the “how” is missing
- End the “Win / Lose” mentality
- Implement the TRC Actions without reducing funding for other services
- Add action to issues being discussed

“Education and prevention of the causes of homelessness has to be the central point of focus”

– table discussion

- Re-think “cultural outcomes”, looking at Indigenous indicators
- Stop doing research and start doing something, the need for more action was raised frequently
- Encourage government officials to attend sessions such as this to listen and help organizations to address homelessness
 - listening is key, leave pre-judgement and racism at the door
- Include the Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada and the TRC report in policy decisions
- Create an Indigenous Caucus in Non–Indigenous organizations could be helpful
- Create resources such as ‘150 things to be know about Indigenous people, customs, beliefs, etc.’

This report speaks to both effective and ineffective policies and procedures, and highlights limitations of programs and gaps between jurisdictions that are hindering progress towards ending homelessness.

One issue that warrants further attention is a matter that emerged more for its lack of round table discussions, than its thorough consideration during the day. That issue is the alignment of work on homelessness at multiple jurisdictional levels (federal, provincial and local). There is no question that this may be a complex and multifaceted discussion, however, the overall tone from the summit suggested this is a much-needed discussion. A future half or full day session focused solely on this issue merits thoughtful consideration.

Appendix A: Agenda Pre-Conference Summit on Indigenous Homelessness

October 24th, 2017

Elder Prayer and Smudge	Mr. Wally Swain
Welcome Remarks	Grand Chief Arlen Dumas
Sponsor Opening Remarks	Mr. Kevin Sitka, CEO Assiniboine Credit Union
Welcome Remarks and Introduction of Moderators (Ms. Tasha Spillett & Mr. Lenard Monkman)	Mr. Louis Sorin
Explanation of Process	Ms. Tasha Spillett and Mr. Lenard Monkman
Moving from Definition to Action: Canadian National Indigenous Homelessness Definition	Mr. Jesse Thistle and Ms. Althea Guiboche
Homelessness and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reflections and Actions to Reconcile our Relationships with Indigenous People	Ms. Celeste McKay
Aligning Homelessness Work at Federal, Provincial, and Local Levels: Panel Presentation	Ms. Sharon Redsky, Ms. Holly Jarrett, Mr. Jason Whitford, Ms. Kelly Holmes
Health Break	
Gathering the Knowledge from the Circle: Focused Roundtable Discussions	
Acknowledgements and Thank you	Mr. Louis Sorin