

2013 January 22: For immediate release

### **Homeless count results show need for more action**

The need for increased government commitment to funding housing is demonstrated with the release of numbers for the 2012 count of people in Edmonton who are homeless.

“Ending homelessness and ensuring people have decent homes will never be achieved until the federal and Alberta governments accept a responsibility to invest adequately in these goals,” comments Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) spokesperson Jim Gurnett.

“The number of homeless people counted in 2012 is virtually unchanged from the number counted in 2004. Since the Homeless Commission says almost 1800 homeless people have been housed under the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness in the past three years, it is clear much work remains to be done,” Gurnett observes.

Changes in the methodology to eliminate double counting likely account for some of the lower numbers in the 2012 count compared to previous counts, rather than actual reductions in numbers of people who are homeless.

“We need to be especially concerned about children and youth who are homeless. One third of all those counted are under 30 years of age and 13% are children,” Gurnett points out. While there have been shifts in the age distribution of those counted in the older age groups, the percentage of children has remained stubbornly consistent since 2006, which ECOHH says points to failure to develop appropriate services for families with children.

Immigrant-serving community agencies were not involved in the count, so ECOHH suggests the incidence of homelessness may be higher than the count suggests, because use of emergency shelters or living on the street is less common with this population.

“The focus of the 10 Year Plan has been people who are hard to house and who have difficulties retaining housing. It is important to address the needs of these people. But the results of the 2012 count should concern Edmontonians, because it may be evidence we are failing to prevent new people from falling into homelessness,” Gurnett observes.

Recent information from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation shows rents are increasing and the number of available units is shrinking. At the same time Edmonton is experiencing significant in-migration. The risk will grow of more people being without adequate housing of their own, or being homeless and depending on emergency shelters or unsafe or inappropriate temporary measures.

“It is essential the upcoming provincial and federal budgets make substantial investments in additional non-market housing, and properly fund rent supplement programs to clear long waiting lists for affordable accommodations. The count report should be taken as a warning message to Edmontonians to contact their elected representatives and insist on resources to turn around the housing crisis.

“In 1999 there were just over 800 homeless people identified in our city. Today the number is 2.6 times greater. The economic, social and personal costs of letting this go on are gigantic. In

Alberta we have the resources to make sure everyone has a decent place to call home-- and that will also ensure we have strong healthy communities,” concludes Gurnett.

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ECOHH is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to decent affordable housing being available for all people.

The 2012 count of homeless people in Edmonton is available at the Homeward Trust website ([www.homewardtrust.ca](http://www.homewardtrust.ca)).