

THE STREET HEALTH REPORT 2007



photos of survey respondents courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Background

Homelessness is a devastating social problem that affects a large number of people in Toronto. While it is broadly recognized that homeless people have much poorer health than the general population, there is a lack of comprehensive and current information on the health status and needs of this group.

The **Street Health Report 2007** is a follow-up to the 1992 **Street Health Report**, which was the first study in Canada to document the health status and access to health care of homeless people.

Street Health conducted this research to create up-to-date evidence on which to ground its ongoing advocacy efforts.

Study Methods

A representative random sample of 368 homeless men and women were surveyed at single adult shelters and meal programs in Toronto in the winter of 2006/2007.

Survey topics included: demographics, physical and mental health status, health determinants, health care utilization and barriers to services.

Homelessness was defined as: having stayed in a shelter, with a friend/relative, in a public place or other site not intended for human habitation for at least 10 of the last 30 nights.

RESEARCH TEAM

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This study was conducted in partnership with the Wellesley Institute.

The **Street Health Report 2007** and other research publications by Street Health are available at www.streethealth.ca.

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Report Highlights

The study found that homelessness is generally not a short-term crisis.

People become homeless and stay homeless largely because of poverty.

Homeless people have significantly worse health than the general population and face major barriers to health care.

The health of homeless people in Toronto has gotten worse in the past 15 years.

78% of all respondents had been homeless for one year or longer

36% lived on \$200 a month or less

74% had at least one serious chronic or ongoing physical health condition

56% had experienced serious depression in the past year

10% had attempted suicide in the past year

35% had been physically assaulted or beaten up in the past year

59% did not have a family doctor

28% had been refused health care in the past year because they did not have a health card

40% said that they had been judged unfairly or treated with disrespect by a doctor or medical staff at least once the past year

Street Health Action Plan

The **Street Health Report 2007** outlines an action plan consisting of targeted, feasible solutions to improve the health of homeless people and ultimately end homelessness. It sets out a series of recommendations to:

- Address the poverty and inequality that underlies homelessness
- Improve access to affordable and appropriate housing
- Improve immediate living conditions for homeless people
- Improve access to health care and support for homeless people

Community Involvement

The study involved extensive collaboration with a wide range of community, academic and institutional partners.

A Community Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from community organizations and groups working on poverty, homelessness and health issues (including front line workers and community-based researchers); academic researchers; and people with lived experience of homelessness provided direction at each stage of the research process.

Key study partners included the Centre for Research on Inner City Health at St. Michael's Hospital, the National Film Board of Canada, and the Wellesley Institute.

The study employed a team of fifteen peer researchers with lived experience of homelessness throughout the data collection, analysis and dissemination stages.

Survey Respondents

73% male **26%** female **1%** trans

4.7 average years homeless

42 average age

77% born in Canada

72% had lived in Toronto 10 years or more

37% identified as belonging to a racialized group

53% had completed high school

Street Health Stories

In partnership with the National Film Board of Canada's Filmmaker-in-Residence project, the study also included a series of qualitative interviews and portrait photographs with a smaller group of survey participants. These were used to create a photo and sound exhibit, as well as a 9-minute film entitled **Street Health Stories**.

ABOUT STREET HEALTH

Street Health is an innovative, community-based health care organization providing services to address a wide range of physical, mental and emotional needs for those who are homeless, poor and socially marginalized in Toronto.



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