



## **Prairie Research Centre: Aboriginal Homelessness in Flin Flon, Manitoba**

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- Based on the data collected, it appears that the proportion of Flin Flon's population that is Aboriginal and homeless is higher than homeless statistics in Canada overall.
- Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless population represents 1.7% of Flin Flon's total population (including the Saskatchewan portion of Flin Flon).
- Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless population represent a high needs population with high levels of unemployment, low education and income levels, welfare dependence, trauma and health needs.
- On reserve housing availability due to over-crowding was reported as a key factor revealing some jurisdictional issues.
- Addictions and mental health issues were significantly present in almost all cases being examined identifying a strong need for other resources and services to address homelessness.
- The Aboriginal homeless population shares some of the determinants of homelessness with other homeless populations, they experience additional unique factors stemming from colonial histories.
- A multi-service approach that is culturally relevant is needed with strong partnerships between organizations and communities to address Aboriginal homelessness.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research study was response from a community based request that arose from the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre. The research aims to examine the characteristics and the increase of the Aboriginal homeless population in Flin Flon. This research supported the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre to document the characteristics and needs of the homeless Aboriginal population in Flin Flon; built research capacity by developing appropriate methods and instruments for studying the characteristics and dynamics of homeless Aboriginal people in small northern communities; developed recommendations

for policy responses, and communicated results to a variety of relevant audiences.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre  
University of Winnipeg

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the study was not to obtain a representative sample of Aboriginal homeless individuals in Flin Flon but to gain some understanding of their situation. A total of 32 participants were interviewed. Interview participants in this study were characterized by low income and education rates, high welfare dependence, and low levels of employment. Three quarters (75.0%) were First Nations and one quarter (25.0%) were Métis or non-Status. A literature review was also conducted to provide further scope on the issue.

Participants of this study were reached through various avenues including interviewing some individuals staying in the Friendship Centre hostel, and through referrals from individuals homeless networks. The Friendship Centre hostel manager conducted the interviews with homeless participants, as she was known in the community. The goal of the interviews was to obtain information about a variety of situations characterizing Aboriginal homeless people in Flin Flon.

Interviews were also conducted at a number of social agencies involved with homeless people in Flin Flon in order to become familiar with different homeless populations, the services they provided, and their sense of changes in the last five years.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

A literature review revealed that while Aboriginal people share some of the determinants of homelessness with other homeless populations, they experience additional unique factors stemming from colonial histories.

The data collected showed that the proportion of Flin Flon's population that is Aboriginal and homeless is higher than homeless statistics in Canada overall. Credible estimates place the size of the Flin Flon homeless population at about 100 people, including families, youth going to school, people camping and living in vans, individual couch surfing in marginal situations, and people using the Friendship Centre hostel.

Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless population represents 1.7% of Flin Flon's total population (including the Saskatchewan portion of Flin Flon). In contrast, homelessness advocates estimate that approximately 0.5% of Canada's population is homeless. If we remove the number of individual estimated to be couch surfing, Flin Flon's homeless population still represents 0.9% of Flin Flon's total population, about double the national rate.

This study also revealed that housing conditions on the reserves near Flin Flon, including reserves in Saskatchewan, creates some serious jurisdictional issues in terms of responsibility of providing housing. Participants interviewed disclosed that additional reasons for being homeless were that housing on reserves were either not available or there was over-crowding. This further identified that there are gaps and barriers that need to be addressed when examining Aboriginal housing needs.

At the time of the interview, eight (25.0%) participants were staying in the Friendship Centre hostel, thirteen (43.8%) were couch surfing, eight (25.0%) were staying outside, and two (6.3%) were staying in other situations. All of the participants had experiences with homelessness in the previous two years. The conditions some of the participants described were shocking.

Participants' self-perceived health conditions were worse than those experienced by Canadians generally, and the majority of them had one or more chronic conditions, often associated with poverty, addictions, and violence. Two thirds had been physically or sexually abused, and many experienced other traumas. Over half said that they or someone else thought they had a drinking problem. These statistics point to a very high needs population.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In Flin Flon there has been an apparent increase in the number of homeless people, this has become an important issue for the City and various service organizations to begin to address.

The research revealed that a number of organizations in Flin Flon that provide services to homeless individuals such as service use, especially for medical services, appears relatively high, and it may be that the provision of supportive housing would reduce these costs. Flin Flon's Aboriginal homeless people represent a high needs population with high levels of unemployment, welfare dependence, trauma and health needs. The final report of this project made a number of recommendations for the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre in cooperation with other service and City organizations in Flin Flon:

- Organizations working with homeless Aboriginal people in Flin Flon should attempt work collaboratively to share their knowledge to derive a reliable estimate of the size and characteristics of the population.
- Aboriginal homeless people are over-represented in Flin Flon compared to national averages. This appears to be a serious issue that requires the attention of service providers, the RCMP, the city and, the government.
- The service providers' interviews suggest that there are quite a few organizations in Flin Flon who are concerned about homeless individuals and who provide a variety of services. These organizations should meet to work out a strategy.

- Given the large number of Aboriginal homeless individuals in Flin Flon, the literature that indicates that a strong Aboriginal cultural presence is important in providing homeless services, and their current experience with homeless individuals, the Friendship Centre should take a leading role in homelessness strategies for Flin Flon.
- Possibly working together with Flin Flon schools the Friendship Centre should extend its survey to explore the situation of youth homelessness in Flin Flon.
- Reserve housing remains an important source of urban homelessness nationally, and this appears to be the case in Flin Flon. This underlines the responsibility of the federal government in urban Aboriginal homelessness.
- The very low employment and education rates of this population suggest that they will need supportive services even after they have been housed.
- The high incidence of chronic conditions, addictions, trauma and abuse in the hidden homeless population suggests that simply providing housing will not be enough to meet their needs. A variety of services also need to be provided.
- It may be useful for service providers in Flin Flon to explore the costs of providing services to homeless individuals who are high services users and to compare these costs to the expenses involved in providing supportive housing.

**For more information on this project visit:**

<http://uakn.org/research-project/defining-and-responding-to-aboriginal-homelessness-in-flin-flon/>

**About Us:**

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. This research was funded by a SSHRC Partnership grant entitled Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network: research for a better life, for more information visit [www.uakn.org](http://www.uakn.org).



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