

# Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Alternative Report on Children's Rights in Canada - 5th/6th Review of Canada under the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Category: Health and Welfare

Submission by: A Way Home Canada and the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

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## DUTY TO ASSIST: Accelerating Canada's Obligations Under General Comment No. 21

### Authors:

David French - Director of Policy and Planning - A Way Home Canada - [dfrench@awayhome.ca](mailto:dfrench@awayhome.ca)

Julia Verena Lalande - Managing Director - Making the Shift - Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab - [jlalande@yorku.ca](mailto:jlalande@yorku.ca)



canadian  
observatory on  
homelessness



A WAY HOME  
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI  
CANADA



MAKING  
THE SHIFT  
INC.



MAKING  
THE SHIFT  
youth homelessness  
demonstration lab

This submission draws heavily on the conceptual framing of the [Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#), [WHAT WOULD IT TAKE? Youth Across Canada Speak Out on Youth Homelessness Prevention](#), [A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#), [Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness](#). This submission also builds upon the evidence reviewed [in Youth Homelessness Prevention: An International Review of Evidence](#). The intellectual guidance and leadership demonstrated by Dr. Stephen Gaetz, President and CEO of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Melanie Redman, President and CEO of A Way Home Canada, Dr. Kaitlin Schwan, Lead Researcher at United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Dr. Erin Dej, Assistant Professor, Department of Criminology, Wilfrid Laurier University and Dr. Jesse Thistle, Assistant Professor in Métis Studies at York University in Toronto has allowed us to sufficiently frame this submission.

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# Introduction

## Submittor:

*A Way Home* is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice. *A Way Home* is also an international movement for change that began with [A Way Home Canada](#). We work with all orders of government, communities, services providers and philanthropy to create a policy, investment and service environment that enables a shift away from simply “managing” the problem of youth homelessness through emergency services to a more proactive, rights-based approach that focuses on prevention (stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place) and helping those who are homeless move into housing with supports as rapidly as possible in a safe and planned way. Our collective work is evidence-driven and solutions-focused.

The [Making the Shift \(MtS\) Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab is a Network of Centres of Excellence](#) with an initial investment of \$17.9 million over five years from the Government of Canada's Research Tri-Council. Leveraging the strengths of lead partners the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness at York University and A Way Home Canada, MtS' vision is to establish Canada as the world leader in research and knowledge mobilization specific to youth homelessness prevention and sustained exits from homelessness. Through partnership and collaboration, the focus of our work will be to inspire and support a shift away from the current emergency response towards a more effective emphasis on youth homelessness prevention and housing stabilization.

# Situational Analysis

## General Comment 21

General Comments are published by United Nations treaty bodies, to interpret and provide guidance on human rights treaties. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) is the key piece of international law on children's rights. It describes what children need to survive, grow and reach their potential in life.

In 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations. For the first time ever, street children became the focus of authoritative United Nations guidance to States on how to uphold the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). The objectives of the general comment are:

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- > (a) To clarify the obligations of States in applying a child rights approach to strategies and initiatives for children in street situations;
- > (b) To provide comprehensive and authoritative guidance to States on using a holistic, child rights approach to: prevent children experiencing rights violations and the lack of choices that results in them having to depend on the streets for their survival and development; and to promote and protect the rights of children already in street situations, ensuring a continuum of care and helping them to develop to their fullest potential;
- > (c) To identify the implications of particular articles of the Convention for children in street situations to enhance respect for them as rights holders and full citizens, and to enhance understanding of children's connections to the street.<sup>1</sup>

Importantly for Canada and A Way Home Canada, the general comment focus aligns with the [Youth Rights! Right Now Human Rights Guide to Ending Youth Homelessness](#) (the Guide) that was developed in partnership with Canada Without Poverty, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless) under the expertise and guidance of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Ms. Leilani Farha. The Guide underpins all of our collective work and serves as the foundation for our policy, planning, practice and innovation efforts. This is coupled with Bill C-97 receiving Royal Assent, which includes the National Housing Strategy Act. For the first time, housing as a human right is now recognized in Canadian legislation.

The legislation is based on the understanding that the housing strategy will establish national goals, timelines and outcomes relating to housing and homelessness consistent with the commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing. Ensuring that housing barriers or systemic issues related to access to housing will be identified through the Housing Advocate, National Housing Council and Review Panel by engaging meaningfully with affected groups and communities. The legislation requires that these issues will be addressed in an ongoing process to fully implement housing as a human right. In concert, these are important levers as Canada now has an opportunity to reset the framework within which we conceptualize, develop, and implement housing policy in Canada. How this housing policy translates to children and youth and specifically to youth under the age of majority rests within the realization of the general comment objectives through Duty to Assist.

Much of this work is bolstered by [Making the Shift](#) (MtS), a Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab with a mandate to contribute to the transformation of how we respond to youth homelessness through research and knowledge mobilization specific to youth homelessness prevention and housing stabilization. MtS is a federally funded Networks of Centres of Excellence co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada, hosted at York University. Through its research funding stream and its Knowledge Mobilization

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Committee on the Rights of the Child General comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations. June 21, 2017. <https://www.streetchildren.org/resources/general-comment-no-21-2017-on-children-in-street-situations/>

strategy, Making the Shift will generate new insights, cultivate and mobilize innovative and effective solutions to youth homelessness, and support implementation of effective policy and program models by governments, funders, and communities alike.

## Rights of a Child and Duty to Assist

### *What are Child Rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of a Child?*

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a child rights approach is one that:

- (a) *Furtheres the realization of child rights as established in the Convention and other international human rights instruments;*
- (b) *Uses child rights standards and principles from the Convention and other international human rights instruments to guide behaviour, actions, policies and programmes, particularly: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; the right to be heard and taken seriously; and the child's right to be guided in the exercise of his or her rights by caregivers, parents and community members, in line with the child's evolving capacities.*

### *What is Duty to Assist?*

*Duty to Assist means that there is a legal duty to ensure that young people are provided with information, advice, and housing-led supports to avoid an experience of homelessness, or to make that experience as brief as possible. Duty to Assist is a rights-based approach to youth homelessness. The fulfilment of young people's social and economic rights must include legal and practical mechanisms to seek assistance and redress in the event that their rights are violated (or soon will be). Currently, there largely is no protocol or legal requirement to assist youth in distress outside of the child welfare context. Duty to Assist also helps us resolve the contradiction between a human rights based approach to preventing and resolving homelessness, and the more narrow prioritization of chronic and high acuity (and mostly adult) populations that is dominant in North America.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). Report 6: Duty to Assist – A Human Rights Approach to Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

## It is Time to Think Differently

Prevention is generally accepted as more effective and desirable than waiting for complex problems to spiral out of control before intervening. Unfortunately, in North America the notion of preventing the problem of homelessness is not well understood and has not yet gained traction in policy, practice, or investment. For many years, crisis responses to homelessness have been relied upon to meet the immediate survival needs of young people who experience homelessness through emergency shelters, day programs, and law enforcement. This reliance on crisis responses, while well-meaning, has not produced the outcomes we want. There has been no demonstrable decrease in the number of young people that end up on the street, and young people who are homeless continue to suffer tremendously, experiencing violence, nutritional vulnerability, mental health crises, isolation, and discrimination. The pan-Canadian [Without a Home study](#) brought to light an ongoing crisis, revealing that among youth experiencing homelessness:

**40.1%** were under the age of 16 when they first experienced homelessness;

**76%** had multiple experiences of homelessness, with 37% of these youth reporting more than five experiences of homelessness;

**85.4%** were experiencing a mental health crisis, with 42% reporting at least one suicide attempt;

**38%** of young women reported a sexual assault in the previous 12 months;

**57.8%** had involvement with child welfare involvement. Compared to national data (Statistics Canada, 2011), youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely to have had involvement with child welfare (see also Nichols et al., 2017);

**63.1%** had experienced childhood trauma and abuse;

**51%** were not currently involved in either education, employment, or training; and Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, and LGBTQ2S+ youth are overrepresented in homeless youth populations across Canada.

The Without a Home study also highlights some important linkages that show overall resilience in young people at a commitment to their futures, despite their circumstances.

**73.9%** indicated they would like to re-engage with their education

**19.7%** were employed (*unemployment rate amongst youth in the general Canadian public was 13.3% at the time of the survey*).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd & Kaitlin Schwan. (2016). Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

To further emphasize and bolster the 2016 Without a Home study data, UNICEF Canada released the [Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being 2019 Baseline Report](#) (the Index) in 2019. The Index brings together a wide range of data into one framework to encourage a comprehensive and balanced view of how kids in Canada are faring. UNICEF is tracking 125 indicators across nine dimensions of the lives of children and youth, from birth to age 18, using the most recent population-level, statistical data.

This report is a profile of children and youth that provides a baseline from which future reports will track progress. It complements the UNICEF Report Cards that look at life for kids in the world's rich countries. Staggeringly, the Index also revealed data that suggests Canada is failing to meet the needs of children and youth across a number of focus areas that are predictors of homelessness:

**23.3%** of 11–15 year-olds report going to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food at home

**20%** of children under 18 live in a household with income lower than 60% of the median (LIM)

**3.5%** of children under 18 living in deep income poverty (below 75% of Canada's Official Poverty Line)

**12.6%** of children under 18 have a [core housing](#) need; and

**3%** of Canadian youth between the ages of 15 and 17 have been homeless and/or have experienced hidden homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

*A number of conclusions can be drawn from these numbers:*

**First**, we are waiting far too long to intervene when young people are at risk of homelessness, or experiencing homelessness.

**Second**, experiencing homelessness for any length of time can have a devastating impact on health, safety, mental health and well-being of young people.

**Third**, some young people – particularly Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2S+ youth, newcomer youth, and young women – experience the additional burden of ongoing discrimination and bias-based violence and exclusion.

**Fourth**, emergency responses on their own do not prevent homelessness, or necessarily help youth exit homelessness rapidly. Relying on such a crisis-based approach does not offer an effective or adequate solution to the problem of youth homelessness, and we therefore cannot and should not expect young people to “bootstrap” themselves out of homelessness.

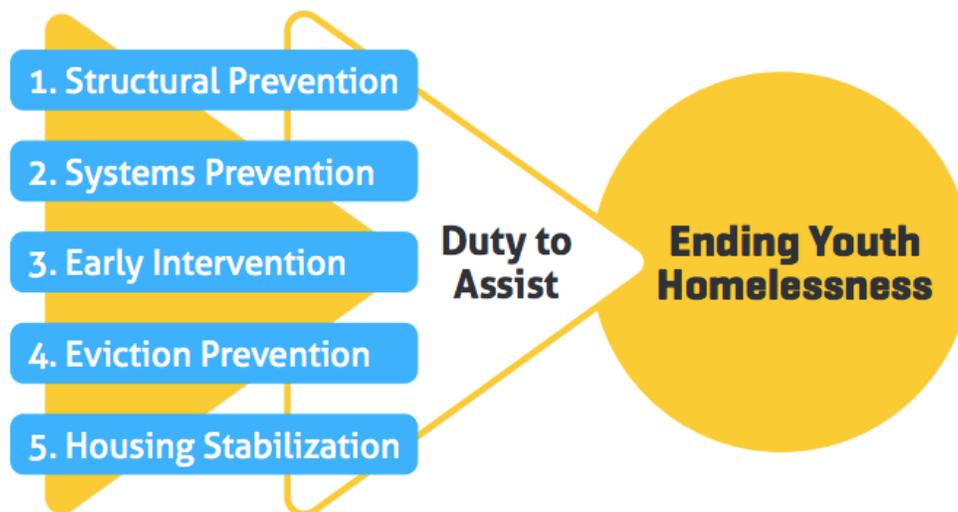
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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Canada, Child and Youth Well-being, 2019 Baseline Report. September 3, 2019. <https://oneyouth.unicef.ca/en/child-and-youth-well-being-index>

Fifth, our public systems are failing to prevent young people from entering homelessness. It is clear that we are missing many opportunities to prevent youth homelessness within public systems. Finally, people with lived experience of youth homelessness strongly profess the need to shift from the crisis response to a focus on prevention and sustainable exits from homelessness. In a recent national consultation conducted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada, youth stated that “by building a response that is primarily reactive, we not only condemn youth to hardship and trauma, we actually ensure it”.<sup>5</sup>

## A Youth Homelessness Social Policy Framework

To conceptualize types of homelessness prevention for youth, [The Roadmap for Youth Homelessness Prevention](#) (the Roadmap) was developed that builds on the typology within [A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention](#). This typology articulates a range of preventative activities that aim to stabilize housing, improve health and wellbeing, promote social inclusion, and contribute to better long-term outcomes for youth and their families.



That fact that youth homelessness exists in Canada, and that we allow young people to remain trapped in homelessness, represents a denial of basic human rights. As a human rights violation, youth homelessness must be remedied. In alignment with General Comment 21, it means that policies, laws, and strategies aimed at youth homelessness prevention must be grounded in human rights at all stages of development, implementation, and evaluation. In consideration of the human rights of young people, The Roadmap adds an additional legislative

<sup>5</sup> Schwan, K., Gaetz, S., French, D., Redman, M., Thistle, J., & Dej, E. (2018). What Would it Take? Youth Across Canada Speak Out on Youth Homelessness Prevention. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

strategy to the homelessness prevention typology: Duty to Assist. Duty to Assist means that there is a legal duty to ensure that young people are provided with information, advice, and housing-led supports to avoid an experience of homelessness, or to make that experience as brief as possible. Duty to Assist is a rights-based approach to youth homelessness.

## **Duty to Assist: Accelerating Canada's Obligations Under General Comment No. 21**

Preventing youth homelessness requires that young people be assured of a process to gain immediate access to housing and supports to remedy the risk or experience of homelessness. In practical terms, this means that higher levels of government provide a policy and funding framework for homelessness prevention, and provide communities with necessary resources and supports to enable them to fulfill the requirement of providing information, advice, and assistance to young people under the age of 25 who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This is the work of Duty to Assist.

As a rights-based approach to youth homelessness, Duty to Assist is legally enforceable and judiciable, providing a young person with the opportunity for legal recourse if the state fails to take reasonable steps to prevent their homelessness. Duty to Assist legislation identifies and articulates jurisdictional responsibilities within and between different orders of government in order to make their best effort to ensure any young person who is referred for assistance (including through self-referral) is provided with the appropriate supports, information, and advice to remain housed, or quickly become re-housed. This statutory duty is not met by referring a young person to an emergency shelter or other homelessness services that do not proactively prevent their homelessness or help them exit homelessness rapidly and in a sustained way.

### **Prototyping Duty to Assist**

The project focused on gaining a deep qualitative understanding of how youth come to understand what services are available to them and to better understand the role parents, teachers, and other natural supports play in helping youth access these services. Cross team members worked collaboratively with community stakeholders to codesign service supports, test service prototypes in situations and make refinements based on feedback that bring the Duty to Assist policy to life. Following the prototype, work continues in Hamilton with key stakeholders to lay the groundwork for Duty to Assist.

*The Duty to Assist can result in a series of different outcomes:*

- › A young person's homelessness is prevented if they are at risk of homelessness;
- › If prevention efforts are not successful, a young person's homelessness is relieved (accommodation is available for at least 6 months);
- › If a young person is currently homeless but did not access prevention support previously, their homelessness is relieved (accommodation is available for at least 6 months);

The concept of Duty to Assist has been put in practice in Europe with the [Housing \(Wales\) Act of 2014](#), which articulated a comprehensive and rights-based approach to homelessness prevention (it should be noted that the Welsh legislation applies to all people at risk of homelessness, and does not specifically target youth). Central to this legislation is a requirement that local authorities (municipal government) have a duty to provide information, advice, assistance, and navigation supports to people seeking help, and a "duty to help to prevent an applicant from becoming homeless" (section 66) if a person or family is:

*a)* threatened with homelessness, and

*b)* eligible for help.

In addition to ensuring that there are funded early intervention programs in place, this strategy stresses a systems-based approach to collaboration. Practically, this means local authorities are directed to "cooperate with other public authorities, non-profit and voluntary organizations, and other individuals and providers to ensure services are in place to meet the needs of particular groups who are deemed to be at higher risk of homelessness" (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 52). A preliminary evaluation of the impact of the Welsh legislation has demonstrated positive results in that services have been "successfully reoriented towards prevention, creating a more supportive environment, reducing the number of people in temporary accommodation and decreasing the number who remain homeless after seeking help" (Mackie et al., 2017, p. 81).

Considerations for Policy and Program Design implementing a statutory Duty to Assist in Canada requires the following key elements and considerations in terms of policy and program design:

## Policy Opportunities

Duty to Assist legislation signals a shift in policy direction on homelessness from a considerable investment in the crisis response, to one that prioritizes the prevention of homelessness and reorienting systems, services, and funding. Realization of the Duty to Assist would support the translation of the Bill C-97 (Right to Housing) as it would pertain to youth.

*As a statutory responsibility that enshrines a universal right to homelessness prevention, Duty to Assist policy would need to include:*

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*Rights-based approach* – The rights protected under a Duty to Assist are not only human rights, but legal rights. In other words, the right to housing and supports would be enforceable and judiciable, providing a young person with the opportunity for legal recourse if there was a failure to take reasonable steps to prevent their homelessness.

*Age mandate* – The Duty to Assist would apply to young people aged 13-24, consistent with the [Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness](#). Provincial and territorial legislation regarding children and youth may already define at what age young people can access supports independently of parents, or who is responsible for addressing the needs of young people at risk under the age of 16 (such as child protection authorities). Therefore, considerations will have to be made to align existing legislation to ensure that young people can access appropriate supports of their choosing.

*Obligation to act* – Upon presentation to the organization/entity locally coordinating the Duty to Assist, state actors are obliged to act within 14 days in order to provide assistance in the form of not just information, but the offer of housing-led support and/or referral.

*Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination* – As a rights-based, client-centred approach, Duty to Assist emphasizes youth choice regarding the range of supports offered. Choices are best made when young people have been provided with sufficient information to make an informed decision on the appropriate options available to them. It is critical that in all instances, the design and implementation of Duty to Assist does not operate coercively or punitively, and that young people's right to choice and self-determination is the cornerstone of this legislation in policy and practice.

*Reconciling different duties to assist* – Different mainstream services may have similar duties to report or assist, including health, justice and child protection, for instance. In child protection legislation, there typically already exists a duty to assist and an obligation to report in cases of suspected abuse and neglect. A Duty to Assist youth homelessness prevention policy should not be confused with similar directives outlined in child protection, for instance. As such, Duty to Assist policy and practice should clarify the circumstances under which reporting and assistance involves child protection or other systems, programs, and services, to avoid confusion and systems dumping (i.e., merely transferring youth from one system to another).

*Addressing the needs of Indigenous youth* – In alignment with the [Calls to Action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), all Duty to Assist efforts must strive to be equitably applied to Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, without service disparities. Indigenous youth should be able to obtain culturally appropriate, Indigenous-led housing and supports. Assistance must be based on a respect for traditional knowledge, cultural traditions and practices, and account for the impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities, including intergenerational trauma.

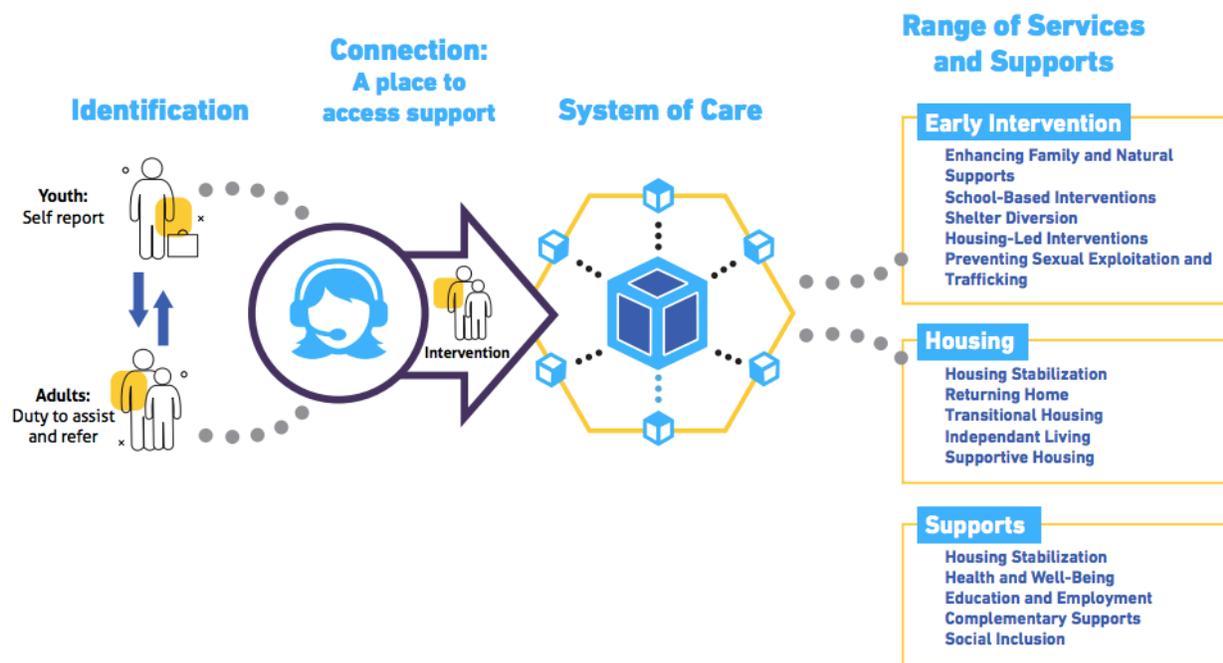
*Quality Assurance* – Duty to Assist legislation must be backed up by measures to ensure full access to support, quality services, opportunities for client feedback and input, and a demonstration of impact. This includes clarity regarding a determination of when the Duty to

Assist has been met. Duty to Assist should assess more than whether a young person has been successfully housed or not, including other quality of life measures that will have an impact on their risk of becoming homeless in the future. Young people need to have a say in whether the offer of support is reasonable, appropriate, and desirable, given their circumstances. Duty to Assist must be focused on truly preventing homelessness, rather than merely deferring homelessness.<sup>6</sup>

## A System of Care and Coordinated Access

Implementing Duty to Assist requires an investment of resources, cross ministerial responsibility and mandate, and potentially several years of systems work at the community level to ensure prevention-focused systems to support young people are fully in place and well-functioning before Duty to Assist becomes a requirement.

With a legal responsibility for a Duty to Assist defined, and an investment in preparing communities to have systems and supports in place to enable implementation, an important question to ask is: how this would work at the community level? What happens between the point where the need for help is identified, and actual supports are delivered? The diagram below illustrates how Duty to Assist can work in practice.



<sup>6</sup> Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). Report 6: Duty to Assist – A Human Rights Approach to Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Coordinated Access (or "Connection" as referenced in the illustration above) is key to both systems integration and implementing prevention program areas for young people at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. The intent is to create a standardized process for intake, assessment, and referral. Accessibility should be an important consideration for coordinated access and with that, there should be as few barriers as possible for accessing support. A 'no wrong door' approach is necessary so young people are able to connect with and access the support they need in a way that is timely, seamless, streamlined, and effective from the perspective of the young person, their family, or the referring adult.

[The Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#) directives outline program requirements to assist federally-funded communities in preventing and reducing homelessness. There are some important new directions that are of specific interest to those focusing on youth homelessness prevention. Importantly, Reaching Home's mandatory community-level outcomes not only require Designated Communities to take action and report on reductions in chronic homelessness. Communities are also required to report on reductions to new inflows into homelessness (note: this is [primary and secondary prevention](#)); and returns to homelessness ([tertiary prevention](#)).

## Duty to Assist in Practice

*Establishing a statutory Duty to Assist legislation makes homelessness prevention a statutory responsibility with defined roles for all orders of government. In practical terms and in the Canadian context, this means that:*

- 1) The Government of Canada is responsible for defining and enforcing the rights of Canadians to housing, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, through Reaching Home, Canada's Homelessness Strategy, the Government of Canada can create an enabling environment for community entities to:
  - › include youth strategies within community systems plans,
  - › implement systems of coordinated entry (with special provisions for youth), and
  - › implement youth-focused prevention interventions. Through its Social Innovation and Social Finance agenda, the Government of Canada can support Duty to Assist demonstration projects (involving social R&D) in order to develop the knowledge and evidence base, and advance our understanding of implementation.
- 2) Provincial and Territorial (P/T) governments are responsible for passing and enforcing Duty to Assist legislation, and impose the Duty to Assist on municipalities (constitutionally, P/T's are the order of government that defines municipal duties). Provinces and territories design the Duty to Assist responsibilities of municipalities, define roles for different ministries, and provide a policy and funding framework to support this work at the municipal level.

3) Municipal governments, working with the local homelessness sector, are responsible for the coordination and delivery of Duty to Assist. Young people at risk of, or who are experiencing homelessness, will make contact with the local homelessness authority (through coordinated entry, discussed below). Following the Welsh model, P/T legislation should define the responsibilities of municipalities/community entities, and specify “the minimum set of interventions that local authorities must have in place ... and local authorities are expected to consider the most appropriate intervention(s) for each person” (Mackie, 2017, p. 86). It is recommended that supports must be offered within 14 days of the young person presenting for help.<sup>7</sup>

## Recommendations 2020-2025

### *Year 1*

1. In partnership with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Canada to make a long-term commitment to enshrine the Duty to Assist principles to uphold Canada's obligations under General Comment 21.
2. The Government of Canada to play a leadership role in convening and creating the conditions with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments, to explore how Duty to Assist legislation could be implemented.

### *Years 2, 3 & 4*

3. The Government of Canada to identify and fund a backbone organization to oversee the implementation of the Duty to Assist principles to ensure their full potential is realized.
4. Within Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, the Government of Canada to invest in five three-year demonstration projects in four provinces or territories to build the evidence base for Duty to Assist nationally.
  - > These investments can be bundled under the Innovation stream to report on practice methods that can achieve new mandatory level outcomes at the community level of reductions in new inflows into homelessness (note: this is [primary and secondary prevention](#)); and returns to homelessness ([tertiary prevention](#)).

### *Years 5*

5. The Government of Canada to introduce Duty to Assist legislation that identifies and articulates jurisdictional responsibilities within and between different orders of government.

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<sup>7</sup> Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). Report 6: Duty to Assist – A Human Rights Approach to Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

## Conclusion

To realize Canada's obligations under General Comment 21, a range of mechanisms need to be in place. At the forefront should be a comprehensive effort to prevent and end youth homelessness that ensures all young people who are at risk of homelessness have access to housing, services, and supports that are age appropriate and delivered in a timely and effective way. The Welsh prevention legislation that mandates a 'Duty to Assist' has proven to be successful in reducing the inflow of individuals and families into homelessness. Adapting Duty to Assist to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults in Canada would enshrine a rights-based approach to addressing youth homelessness. Indeed, a statutory responsibility to provide information, advice, and concrete assistance to young people under the age of 25 who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness will not only contribute to stopping the inflow, but will produce much better outcomes for young people and their families. Such assistance must be immediate, accessible, appropriate, and responsive to youths' human rights and expressed desires for their life.

As part of this work, articulations of clear responsibility at the federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels are critical. The degree of course correction required for Duty to Assist would not only bring departments across government into closer alignment, but would pinpoint which areas within government would have the responsibility for these actions. Implementing a Duty to Assist in Canada is a necessary and achievable goal. Getting there will require systems transformation and a willingness to change the status quo. This will necessarily take work, heart, and political courage, and if successful, it will radically transform the outcomes and life trajectories for vulnerable youth in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). Report 6: Duty to Assist – A Human Rights Approach to Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.