

# YOUTH HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

## INTRODUCTION

The 2019 Homeless Count revealed **2,223** people were homeless in **Vancouver**

In 2016, **11.7%** of the homeless population consisted of youth ages **5-19**



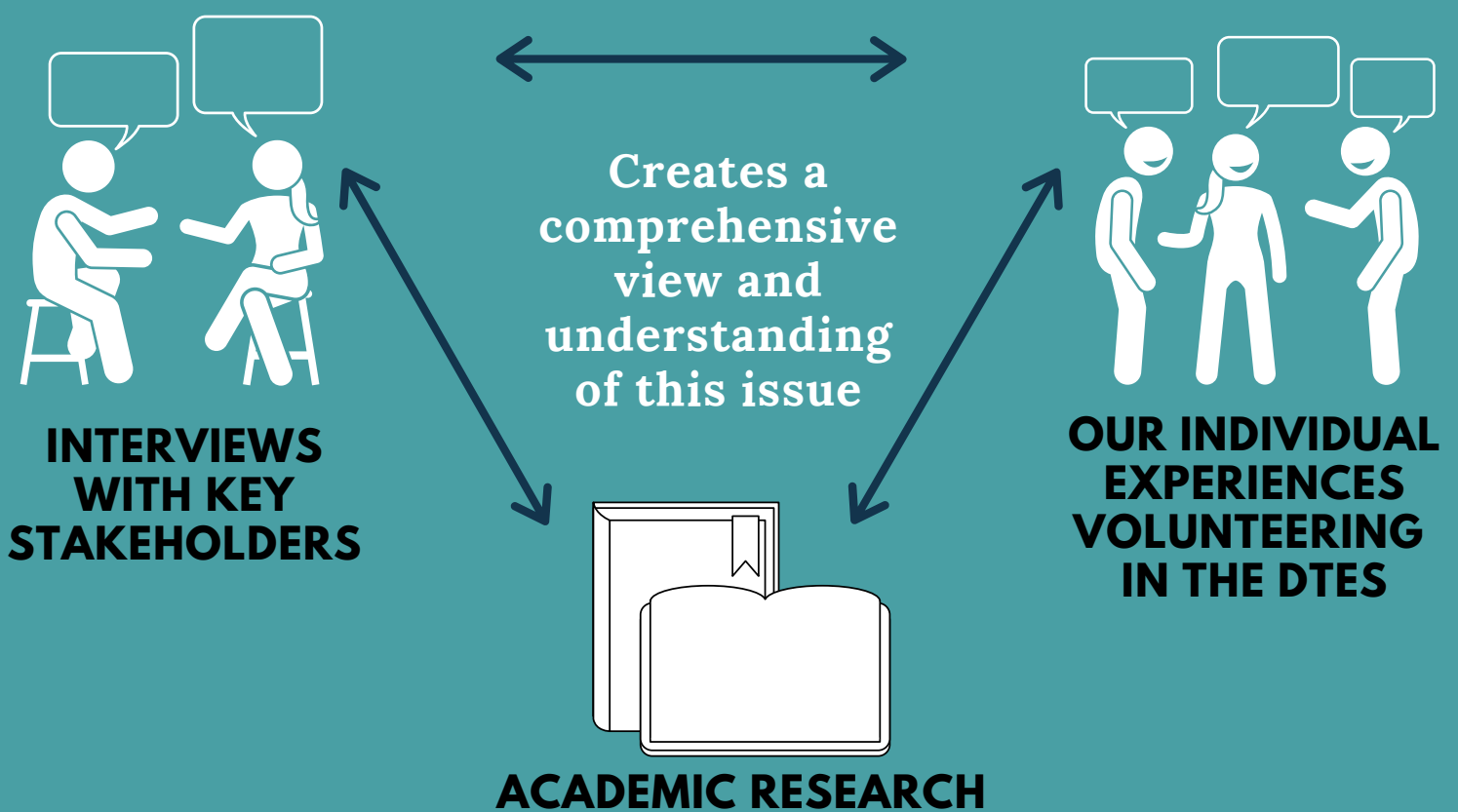
It had the **highest** per capita rate of homelessness in **CANADA**



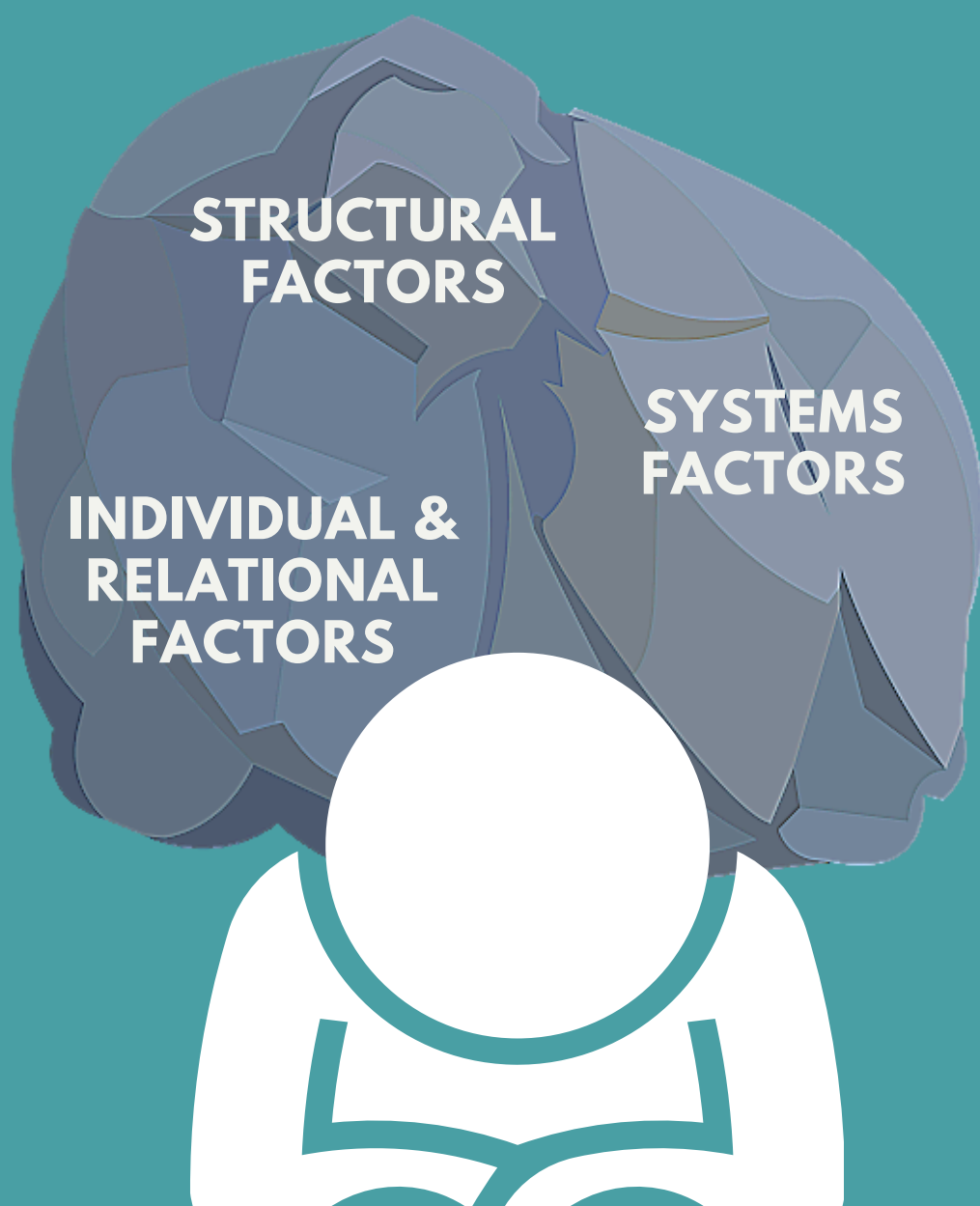
- Three **root causes** of youth homelessness are **structural factors, system factors** and **individual/relational factors**
- Lack of public understanding and empathy affects the government and social strategies
- There are many organizations and resources in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) but they lack coordination
- The closing of mental health institutions in the 1990's resulted in patient homelessness
- As Vancouver gained international status, prices increased as a result of foreign investment and development
- Vancouver is now the most expensive city in Canada
- Financial hardships increase, creating more family conflicts

**Family conflict is one of the leading factors causing youth homelessness**

## SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH



## PROBLEM LANDSCAPE

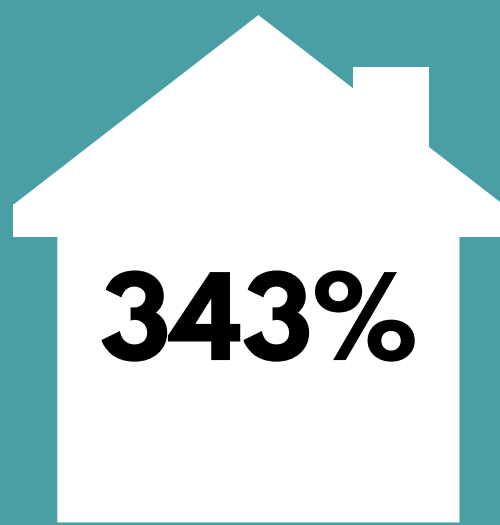


- Unaffordability is an umbrella issue for youth homelessness
- Vancouver is frequently ranked as one of the most attractive and enjoyable cities to live in the world. This has sparked an increase in population and an increase in unaffordability.
- Reduced economic circumstances for families due to the changing nature of Vancouver and overall lack of affordability raises likelihood of family conflict and tension
- Family conflict and unhealthy home environments creates youth wanting or being forced to leave home
- Poor assistance for youth transitioning out of government care creates young adults who stay homeless
- The Single Room Occupancy Accommodations (SRO) are not suitable for the needs of all youth
- Most youth living on the street often develop an addiction or mental illness, which is not properly addressed
- Financial aid is ineffective, as they give \$375 to an individual monthly in a city that requires at least \$1000 to live in

**Since 1988, house prices have increased by**



Vancouver



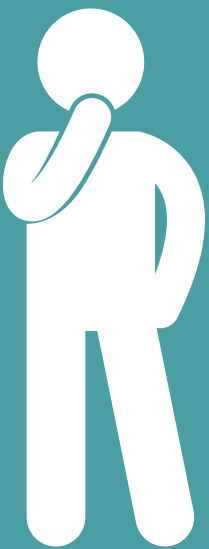
Toronto

**SOLUTION LANDSCAPE**

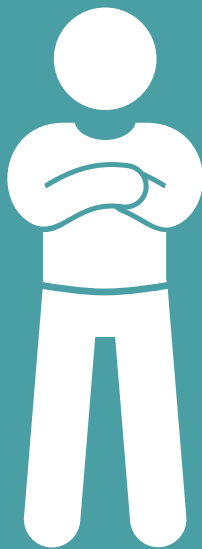
- Current solutions include food banks, emergency shelters and safe-injection sites
  - These solutions fail to encompass a whole-person rehabilitation approach for youth
  - Only create short-term solutions
- Covenant House encompasses all aspects of a youth's needs, however one organization cannot solve the issue
- There is a lack of coordination between resources, making it very difficult for youth to find the help they need
- Finland provides homes for those facing homelessness, so that they can focus on rehabilitation
  - Creating a similar layout in Vancouver creates an opportunity to plan for a better life ahead
- bc211, a Vancouver-based nonprofit organization, specializes in providing information on services
  - We see potential for any new solution to incorporate what bc211 is doing or use their service as part of a broader plan

## GAPS

### INTEREST



### ELIGIBILITY



### OPPORTUNITY



*“...like a combination lock, you need all three in order for the door to open. Somebody may be interested, eligible, but if there's no opportunity, the door does not open. All three of these elements can change within a day and so much of it is out of our control.”*

*- John Kehler, Directions Youth Services*



Lack of public understanding



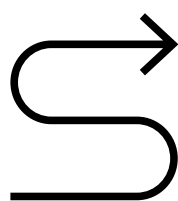
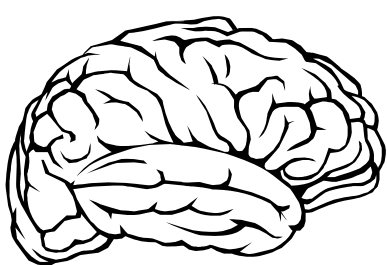
Lack of empathy



Empathy guides support for the issue. Lack of this diminishes support for the issue.




Support for the issue influences government or social (charities) response



## LEVERS OF CHANGE

- We propose forming a centralized government coordination agency based at the provincial level that would create individualized plans for the specific needs of youth
- This agency would encompass all resources needed for rehabilitation
- The government element provides the necessary authority to put together the necessary range of services
- The government and upper/middle class citizens are all affected by the increase in homelessness, meaning they will be more supportive of new initiatives

## KEY INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED




Despite the best intentions and efforts of government and social agencies, the system in place is not effectively addressing the issue.



Youth homelessness is indeed solvable.



The importance of spreading awareness.



Any solution would need to be organized in collaboration with key stakeholders and youth experiencing homelessness.

## CONCLUSION

- Youth homelessness is a complex issue
  - Structural, systems, and individual/relational factors create the backdrop against which youth homelessness occurs
  - Within the category of individual/relational factors, exists family conflict
- Family conflict is a leading cause of youth homelessness
- Together with a lack of understanding and empathy, and the resulting consequences, youth experiencing homelessness require a lot of help
- Yet in the DTES, the lack of progress is not due to a lack of services, but rather a lack of coordination between those services
- When the provincial government and the agencies and services in the DTES work together, our community will begin the process of eradicating youth homelessness

## NEXT STEPS

- Creation of a government coordination agency is an idea that warrants further research
- Whether or not this coordination role should be government run, or whether there should be a stronger leadership role by non-profits, is worth considering
- More research on the topic of youth homelessness, and conversations with key stakeholders, are important next steps in determining the best course of action