HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

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| 1. In point form, list words that describe your mental image of a homeless person. |
| 1. Describe what you feel when you see a homeless person. |
| 1. Record the reasons why you believe people end up homeless. |
| 1. How many people in Canada do you think are homeless? |
| 1. Who do you think is homeless? |

Anticipation Guide

* In the column BEFORE, indicate if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the word “agree” or “disagree”.
* After reading and viewing, complete the AFTER column. Circle “agree” or “disagree” beside each statement and check to see if your opinion has changed base don new evidence.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **BEFORE** Reading/Viewing | STATEMENTS | AFTER Reading/Viewing |
| 1. Agree/Disagree | The situation of the homeless in Canada is improving. | Agree/Disagree |
| 2. Agree/Disagree | The situation of the homeless in Canada is a national social disaster. | Agree/Disagree |
| 3. Agree/Disagree | When the economy is growing and improving, homelessness is reduced. | Agree/Disagree |
| 4. Agree/Disagree | Less than 10% of homeless people are women. | Agree/Disagree |
| 5. Agree/Disagree | All age groups are represented in the homeless population. | Agree/Disagree |
| 6. Agree/Disagree | Homelessness is only an urban, big city problem. | Agree/Disagree |
| 7. Agree/Disagree | Shelters are able to provide beds for all the homeless in need of shelter. | Agree/Disagree |
| 8. Agree/Disagree | The main reasons people are homeless are drug abuse or mental health issues. | Agree/Disagree |
| 9. Agree/Disagree | Homeless persons have employment skills they could use if they wanted. | Agree/Disagree |
| **Application:** In the space provided, rewrite any statements that are inaccurate in an accurate manner. | | | |

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Newspapers are full of disturbing headlines: “**Homeless suffer higher suicide risk, study finds**.” “**Homelessness called growing shame.**” “**Births up among homeless women**.” “**Homelessness a national disaster.**” Homeless people living on the streets are found in the downtown core of any major city in Canada, but has a national disaster occurred? Homelessness is an all too vague term for most people, but a cruel reality for too many others.

There are homeless people in Canada – people literally without homes, people with no private spaces in which to live, people existing from day to day in public places. And the situation is getting worse. In Toronto, front-line workers report two to four deaths each week of homeless people. Studies estimate that 80 000 people in Toronto are at risk of becoming homeless in the near future as a result of overcrowding of existing shelters, substandard housing that they will eventually have to leave, and – for others – simply not having enough money to pay the rent. In Vancouver, social workers report that the spread of HIV infections is a direct result not only of prostitution and drug abuse, but also of homelessness itself. In Montreal, the suicide rate among young street people is 12 times higher that that of young people who have homes. And in Calgary, about half of the city’s homeless population of 3800 is actually being employed but cannot find affordable housing. Homeless people suffer from a poverty cycle and they also face discrimination being stereotyped as being lazy, an unnecessary burden on society, actually preferring life on the street, or, people who “deserve” to be homeless.

There is, however, a troubled awareness that in our own country, in terms of one basic need – a home- too many Canadians are without.

As awareness increases, private organizations have made efforts to assist those sleeping on the streets by proving blankets and operating soup kitchens. Governments disagree as to who is responsible for the homeless. Cities state they are short of funds for all the social welfare programs they must provide. Provinces say that they have no money to fund cities because money from the federal government has been cut back.

Homelessness is one aspect of the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in this country. Despite the efforts of government, social organizations and private citizens, the headlines continue to announce a social disaster.

## Adapted from: CBC News in Review December 98 Online Resource Guide

[www.tv.cbc.ca/newsinreview/dec98/homelessness/percept.htm](http://www.tv.cbc.ca/newsinreview/dec98/homelessness/percept.htm)

**Reading from *CBC News in Review December 98 Online Resource Guide***

**www.tv.cbc.ca/newsinreview/dec98/homelessness/percept.htm**

# HOMELESSNESS: CANADA’S MEAN STREETS

# Perception and Misconception

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ome observers say that one of the reasons the problem of homelessness in Canada’s major cities is not improving is because misconceptions interfere with a true understanding of the problem, thus making it more difficult to organize effective strategies that combine the efforts of private organizations, governments, and the public at large. Anne Golden, Chair of the Toronto Homelessness Task Force, has been gathering information about the reality of the homelessness situation in Canada’s largest city and has identified the misconceptions listed below. Before you read the following information, consider how people often talk about homeless people.

Misconception: *Most homeless people are males suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse*

According to Golden’s research, while two-thirds of homeless people are male and one-third female, the fastest growing segment of the homeless population is women and children. In fact, single mothers head 37 per cent of homeless families. The demand for family hostels has gone up by 123 per cent since 1992. For most of these people, the reason they are living on the streets or in shelters is not because of mental illness or drugs, but because of poverty and lack of safety at home.

**Misconception: *With strong economic growth, the homelessness problem will resolve itself.***

According to the data Golden gathered the direct opposite is true. For the first time in the 20th century we are seeing rising poverty and rising homelessness at the same time that economic prosperity is increasing. In 1996 the poverty rate for all Canadians rose to 17.6 per cent and to more than 20 per cent for children. In Toronto, the child poverty rate is 36 per cent. Not only are there more poor today, but those who are poor are getting poorer. Between 1990 and 1995 average incomes in Toronto fell by 12.5 per cent, and one in four Toronto families now lives below the poverty line. There are also a greater number of people in Toronto who are being evicted. In fact, there has been a 78 per cent increase in evictions from 1992 to 1997. With the waiting list for social housing averaging around eight to 10 years, it is likely that more renters will end up on the street when they cannot make their payments.  
  
Furthermore, in mid-October, a report released by the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto identified a large and growing gap between rich and poor in Canada that economic growth is not helping to narrow. For example, in 1971 the wealthiest 10 per cent of families made 21 times more than the poorest 10 per cent of families. By 1996, the top 10 per cent were making 314 times more than the poorest 10 per cent. In addition, the average salary for a corporate executive rose 13 per cent from 1995 to 1997. Over the same three years, workers’ wages rose no more than two per cent, less than the rate of inflation. And finally, the average family with children under 18 suffered a $4000 decline in real income between 1989 and 1996, and the percentage of families with middle class incomes shrank from 60 per cent to 44 per cent.

**Misconception: *There are plenty of services available to meet the needs of the homeless.***

Right now there are approximately 5000 homeless people in Toronto. Each night about 4500 of them find space to sleep in one of the cities shelters, but over 500 will not be able to find a bed. It is those people who end up sleeping on the streets, in parks, and in abandoned buildings. The shelters that do exist are seriously overcrowded and they are often very unpleasant.

**Misconception: *Homelessness is primarily Toronto’s problem.***

Although Toronto has the greatest number of homeless people in Canada, many of the city’s homeless are not actually from Toronto, or even from Ontario. In fact, a recent report showed that 47 per cent of all the homeless in Toronto in the past nine years come from outside Toronto and 14 per cent from outside the country. Many of them have come looking for jobs and to take advantage of special services. And Toronto itself has been hindered in its ability to deal with the homelessness crisis because of decisions made at the federal and provincial government levels. For example, both the federal and provincial governments have withdrawn from social housing construction.

# Homelessness: Canada’s Mean Streets

After reading the article “Homelessness: Canada’s Mean Streets - Perception and Misconception”, complete the following organizer. Next to each myth or misconception listed, write down facts that help to illustrate the real situation.

|  |  |
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| **Myth** | **Reality** |
| *Most homeless people are males suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse* |  |
| *With strong economic growth, the homeless problem will resolve itself* |  |
| *There are plenty of services available to meet the needs of the homeless* |  |
| *Homelessness is primarily Toronto’s problem* |  |