

Overcrowding

Migration

Seasons

Territory

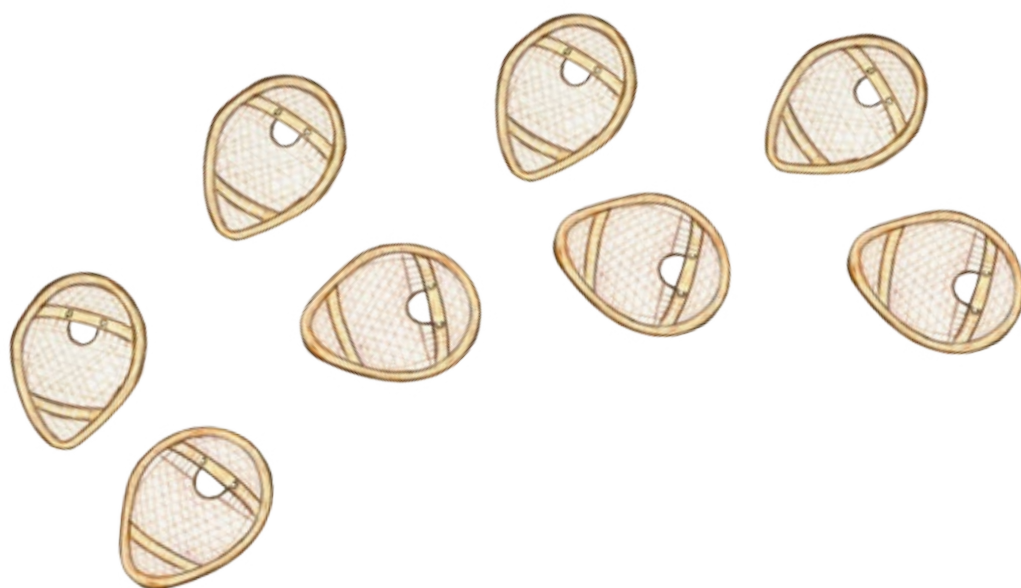
HOMELESSNESS

Portrait of Homelessness in First Nations Communities in Quebec

Solidarity

Insecure housing

Family



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION

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Note that some quotations have been freely translated for the purposes of this portrait.

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Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec (CAAQ)

Native Friendship Centre of Montréal (NFCM)

Missinak community house

Projets Autochtones du Québec (PAQ)

Wendake police force



HIGHLIGHTS

- This portrait is the result of an exploratory study on the phenomenon of homelessness in non-agreement First Nations communities in Quebec. The information provided herein are based on the findings of a literature review and a data collection survey conducted in 13 communities representing five First Nations in Quebec.
- More specifically, the portrait exposes the different forms of homelessness found in the communities, while taking into account the issues related to hidden homelessness and the phenomenon of migration. For each form of homelessness, the portrait establishes the profile of at-risk individuals, identifies the principal factors that lead a person into homelessness or to remaining homeless, and estimates the extent or scale of the phenomenon among the communities.
- The portrait comes on the heels on the provincial policy to fight homelessness, entitled *Ensemble pour éviter la rue et en sortir* (together to avoid and get off the street) (MSSS, 2014a) and the resulting 2015-2020 interministerial action plan on homelessness entitled *Mobilisés et engagés pour prévenir et réduire l'itinérance* (mobilized and committed to prevent and reduce homelessness) (MSSS, 2014b).
- Over the last few years, various homeless enumeration surveys in Canada have revealed an overrepresentation of Aboriginal people among the visibly homeless. This situation translates the wide gap between the social and economic conditions of Aboriginals in Canada and the rest of the population. Given the continued difficult living and housing conditions in First Nations communities, Aboriginal migratory patterns and a colonial legacy that destabilizes traditional social systems, a different approach is required when studying the phenomenon of homelessness among First Nations as opposed to among non-Aboriginals.
- Hidden homelessness is a significant form of homelessness in the participating communities. The scale of the phenomenon can be explained by the effects of the housing crisis in most of the territories, in a context of strong family values that materialize into a sense of solidarity among extended family as well as the absence of the notion of property in traditional First Nations cultures.
- Visible homelessness (or rooflessness – without shelter) is also found in First Nations communities. Though it appears to be more widespread in the summer, it is considered to be particularly problematic in the winter due to the health risks inherent to this lifestyle. Seasonal variations can be explained by individual recourse to insecure housing (couchsurfing) in the winter, in addition to the lack of services for roofless individuals on the communities' territories, which tends to motivate out-migration in the winter.
- The portrait also found disparities based on the participating communities' degree of isolation. For instance, extreme overcrowding was more prevalent in remote communities. In addition, due to the proximity of services, homeless individuals from remote communities and special access communities migrate in greater numbers to urban communities.

- First Nations in general and First Nations in a situation of homelessness reported the same reasons for moving to and from the community. Although there are more opportunities in the city, for instance in terms of accessible housing, it also presents several obstacles that can lead individuals into homelessness.
- Circular mobility, which consists in frequent moves between the community of origin and the city or another First Nations community, contributes to significantly weakening the social network (friends and family) and community network (services) of the homeless people who adopt this lifestyle. In fact, this phenomenon appears to be more prevalent in communities that are less geographically isolated (Zone 1 and Zone 2) than more remote communities (Zone 3 and Zone 4).
- The reasons a person may become homeless are varied and the result of a rather complex dynamic. The individual factors (e.g. mental health or addiction problems, trauma in childhood or as an adult) interact with structural factors with political, historical, economic and cultural dimensions that contribute to the marginalization of First Nations.
- Homelessness on First Nations territories affects men and women differently. Men appear to experience homelessness in greater isolation than women, and are proportionately more numerous to experience situations of visible homelessness and insecure housing (or couchsurfing). Men are also more likely to become homeless after being released from an institution such as a treatment or detention centre.
- Women, being more vulnerable to sexual predation and often accompanied by their children, tend to experience different forms of homelessness, such as extreme overcrowding or loss of housing as a result of domestic violence.
- The contributing factors of homelessness also differed based on gender. According to respondents, homelessness among men is strongly associated with drinking, substance abuse and mental health problems. In addition, community housing policies generally allocate housing to individuals without dependent children last.
- By building on a data collection method that relies primarily on resource person interviews, this portrait was able to confirm the existence of different forms of homelessness in First Nations communities. However, further study is needed in terms of individual trajectories and services in order to better document other dimensions of homelessness, with a view to improving the service offer.

Overcrowding

SYNOPTIC TABLE

RESEARCH FINDINGS RELATING TO THE PORTRAIT OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE COMMUNITIES

	FORMS OF HOMELESSNESS FOUND IN THE COMMUNITIES	CONTRIBUTING FACTORS	PEOPLE AT RISK	SCALE OF PHENOMENON
Hidden homeless	Insecure housing (couchsurfing)	• Strong sense of solidarity among extended family • Alcoholism and/or drug addiction • Mental health problems • Behavioural problems • Death of the “pillar” of the family • Separation • Housing policies that place people without dependent children at the bottom of their housing allocation lists • A lifestyle that can be passed on from generation to generation	Men between the ages of 18 and 40 with no dependent children	A phenomenon that is widespread in the communities and is anticipated to become more prevalent due to the lack of investment in housing stocks
	Unfit housing	• Mold problems that may affect occupant health • Houses condemned for health and safety reasons • Lack of maintenance • Abusive use of premises	• Young families • Households where alcohol/drugs are consumed	A phenomenon found in most of the participating communities
	Extreme overcrowding	• Shortage of affordable housing • Shortage of available housing • Excessively long waiting periods to access band housing • Strong sense of solidarity in the communities	• Multigenerational households • Households with more than one family • Childless couples • Single individuals • Households with high levels of tension	• A phenomenon found in most of the communities, particularly those in rural zones (Zone 2) and remote zones (Zone 3) • Lack of investment in housing stock anticipated to increase prevalence

Migration

	FORMS OF HOMELESSNESS FOUND IN THE COMMUNITIES	CONTRIBUTING FACTORS	PEOPLE AT RISK	SCALE OF PHENOMENON
Visible homeless (or roofless)	People living on the street or in places not intended for human habitation	- Family network fatigue due to mental health problems and addiction patterns - Behavioural problems that lead to “irreparable” acts of violence	Young men between the ages of 18 and 35	A phenomenon that appears to be more widespread in urban communities (Zone 1) and during the summer
	People due to be released from institutions	- Social exclusion following an extreme act of violence or sexual misconduct that led to a jail sentence - Distance of the correctional centre from the home community - Family fatigue (when the family refuses to take someone in due to the heavy burden associated with that responsibility) following a hospital discharge or stay at a treatment centre	Adult men of all ages	A phenomenon that is present but not very common in most of the participating communities
Houseless	People living in shelters for victims of domestic abuse		Young women with children	Difficult to estimate the extent of the phenomenon due to the low reporting rate
	Homeless First Nations youths with a history of foster care	- Trauma associated with being a victim of abuse or neglect in childhood - Adjustment and developmental disorders - Poor sense of identification with the new environment (placed in a non-Aboriginal environment) - Obstacles for reinsertion in the community of origin - Poor access to services in the adoptive community	- Young people who experienced childhood trauma - Young people who were placed outside of their community of origin	

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ACRONYMS

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
AFNQL	Assembly of First Nations Quebec–Labrador
CMHC	Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
ETHOS	European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion
FNQLHSSC	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
INAC	Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
MSSS	Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
NNADAP	National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program
RCAAQ	Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec

TERMINOLOGY

Aboriginal: “The original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations), Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct people with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs” (AANDC, 2015a).

First Nations: First Nations in Quebec refer to “Status” Indians (i.e. registered within the meaning of the *Indian Act*) who are affiliated with a community that belongs to one of the following ten First Nations: the Abenaki, the Algonquin, the Atikamekw, the Cree, the Innu, the Malecite, the Mi'kmaq, the Mohawk, the Naskapi and the Huron-Wendat¹.

Inuit: Literally means “the people” in Inuktitut. Refers to the Aboriginal peoples who live in the Canadian Arctic (AANDC, 2015b). In Quebec, the Inuit live in one of 14 nordic villages in Quebec’s arctic region (Nunavik), north of the 55th parallel (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, 2011).

¹ This study does not include the Cree Nation, nor the Inuit.

PREFACE

The phenomenon of homelessness has gradually taken hold of our nations, which have been left vulnerable as a result of major disruptions to our ways of life (among other things) caused by colonialist policies, laws and systems—such as the *Indian Act* and residential schools—designed to assimilate our people. This research illustrates and explains the forms of homelessness experienced in our communities, and its findings open the door to a nation-to-nation dialogue and with other levels of government in order to support strategies to fight this phenomenon.

Ghislain Picard

Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

Without trying to make this about who has it worse, it is fair to state that Aboriginal homelessness is not well known nor understood, which hinders the implementation of effective interventions and programs. This is a collective issue that must call on all the actors in the communities and in the cities. Helping Aboriginal people find a way out of homelessness is a collective responsibility.

Roch Hurtubise

This research sheds light on the phenomenon of homelessness in First Nations communities. It has demonstrated that homelessness not only exists in most of the participating communities, but that it also manifests in a number of ways. Though the values of solidarity that still exist in First Nations communities have helped blunt the extent of this phenomenon, we must ask: how much longer can this go on?

Robert St-Onge

Quebec can boast several Aboriginal cultural communities with their own identity, such as the First Nations and/or the First Peoples. However, even though Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities share the territory of Quebec, they have few ties between them. It is no surprise that age-old sociohistoric problems have cultivated a mutual ignorance about the other based on preconceived ideas and a social, cultural and political incarceration.

François Buckell

Kwe, the discussions of the Advisory Committee and the findings of this study have confirmed that the phenomenon of homelessness is not restricted to the big cities—it is also found at our very doorsteps, in First Nations communities. I have also learned that the experience of homelessness has nothing to do with the clichés of urban homelessness. Within the communities, homelessness is much less visible.

Nancy Gros-Louis Mchugh

It is interesting to take it a step further and look more into living habits that exist within First Nations communities, and to see the factors of what has led First Nations members to become homeless. To take into account the socioeconomic situations and how they have had an effect on living conditions within these communities and produced indicators for many issues that need to be remedied, while taking into consideration cultural values and the “way of life” of First Nations Communities. Megwetch!

Cheryl Tenasco-Whiteduck

This portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities sheds much needed light on a reality that has thus far been poorly documented in Quebec. It explains the complex nature of homelessness, while underscoring the characteristics that are specific to First Nations communities. Thanks are also owed to the communities, resource persons and the two homeless individuals who participated in this study. Without their help, it would have been impossible to carry this project to term. This portrait is a significant first step towards a better understanding of what homeless people go through in the communities and is certain to lead to a more adapted response to their reality.

Marie-Andrée Gourde

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH MANDATE

In light of the scale and increasingly complex nature of the phenomenon of homelessness in Quebec, the Committee on Health and Social Services of the National Assembly² decided, in April 2008, to study the problem of homelessness in Quebec. The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) participated in the resulting public consultations on the phenomenon of homelessness in Quebec, producing and submitting a joint brief with the Assembly of First Nations Quebec–Labrador (AFNQL). This brief emphasized the heightened presence of the phenomenon of homelessness among First Nations in general, as well as in First Nations communities. At the time, it had already been concluded that the phenomenon needed to be better documented. In this respect, the Committee on Health and Social Services recommended to the Quebec government that it encourage research on homelessness “by providing concrete support to researchers and groups of researchers with an interest in issues such as poverty, social exclusion and homelessness” [translation] (recommendation no. 8.1 of the report) (CSSSIQ, 2009).

These questions are at the core of the FNQLHSSC’s mandates, and furthermore underpin key planning documents such as the *Plan d’action régional des Premières Nations pour lutter contre la pauvreté et l’exclusion sociale* in which the FNQLHSSC lays out its plans to promote economic and community development by, among other things, conducting research on socioeconomic conditions (FNQLHSSC, 2012). In its *2014-2017 Strategic Plan*, the FNQLHSSC also tasked itself to “build awareness among non-Aboriginal people about First Nations realities” and to “carry out, distribute and promote activities in production of knowledge, including related distribution and promotion activities” (FNQLHSSC, 2014).

Building on the work of the Committee of Health and Social Services, the Quebec government adopted the 2010-2013 interministerial action plan on homelessness (Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2010), which was extended to 2013-2014. Among other things, the action plan set out to document the phenomenon of urban Aboriginal homelessness.

At the end of the action plan, the Quebec government, under the coordination of the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS), began work on developing the first provincial policy to fight homelessness. Adopted in 2014, the policy, entitled *Ensemble pour éviter la rue et en sortir* (together to avoid and get off the street) (MSSS, 2014a), gave rise to a second government action plan. The FNQLHSSC, together with 15 other ministries and organizations, eagerly participated in the reflection, with the FNQLHSSC specifically proposing to include in an action plan a measure calling for the creation of a portrait on homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec. These efforts led to the adoption of the 2015-2020 interministerial action plan, entitled *Mobilisés et engagés pour prévenir et réduire l’itinérance* (mobilized and committed to prevent and reduce homelessness) (MSSS, 2014b), in which the Quebec government committed to a number of actions and recognized the importance of “improving our knowledge of homelessness among Aboriginal populations and creating an environment conducive to knowledge sharing” [translation] (action no. 23).

This portrait, produced with financial support from the MSSS, documents the phenomenon of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec, while taking into account the issues related to the phenomena of migration and hidden homelessness.

Mobility



² Formerly known as the Committee on Health and Social Services was called the Committee on Social Affairs.

INTRODUCTION

Being homeless, whether briefly or for an extended period of time, can be profoundly distressing for whoever undergoes the experience. Though Aboriginal people represent only 4% of the Canadian population, they make up a much higher proportion of homeless people in Canada (Sider, 2005; Bélanger and al., 2013).

“While making up 4.3% of the total Canadian population, Aboriginal Peoples form a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population in communities across the country. They make up 16% of the homeless population in Toronto, 30% in Ottawa, 46% in Saskatoon, over 60% in Winnipeg and over 70% in Regina. In Canada, one cannot really discuss homelessness—and its solutions—without explicitly addressing Aboriginal homelessness.” (Gaetz, Gulliver et al., 2014, p. 60)

In Montreal, the homeless street count carried out on March 24, 2015, revealed that Aboriginal people represented 10% of the homeless population (40% of which were Inuit), though making up only 0.6% of the Montreal population (Latimer et al., 2015). This overrepresentation of Aboriginal people among the visible homeless population is a result of their heightened economic and social vulnerability³.

The specific dimensions of the phenomenon of homelessness among First Nations is emphasized in the literature, which points to difficult living and housing conditions in the communities as well as to the high mobility of Aboriginal homeless (compared to homeless people in general). These high levels of mobility moreover make it more difficult to provide Aboriginal homeless with appropriate services (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005; Sider, 2005). When compounded by the racism and discrimination in areas such as employment and housing, the issues facing First Nations turn into particularly large obstacles to social and economic integration.

Though urban Aboriginal homelessness may be documented, the phenomenon of homelessness in the communities is not. In its provincial policy to fight homelessness (MSSS, 2014a) and 2015-2020 interministerial action plan on homelessness, the Quebec government recognized that the phenomenon of Aboriginal homelessness stood apart, in particular because of the exacerbated risk factors affecting First Nations. And indeed, after spending nine days visiting Aboriginal communities in the ten Canadian provinces, the United Nations Special

Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, drew attention to the enormous gap between Aboriginals in Canada and the rest of the population in terms of social and economic conditions (Vastel, 2013; Anaya, 2014).

In recent years, municipal, provincial and federal governments have demonstrated a real concern for monitoring the evolution of the phenomenon of homelessness. However, most enumeration surveys have excluded people not found in public spaces or who do not use the designated resources (Segaert, 2012; MSSS, 2014 c). Indeed, a significant proportion of people who become homeless at some point in their lives will find provisional accommodations among family or friends, and therefore experience a form of hidden homelessness (Gaetz, Gulliver et al., 2014). In addition, most Canadian studies on Aboriginal homelessness focus on the visible manifestation of this phenomenon in urban areas (Sider, 2005; Turcotte, Perreault et al., 2010; CMHC, 2011; Bélanger, Weasel Head et al., 2012; Belanger, Awosoga et al., 2013; Patrick, 2015), and none of the research consulted to date studied First Nations homelessness within the communities themselves.

Objectives of the portrait

This portrait was produced over a period of 12 months (August 2015 to September 2016) and serves as an exploratory study on homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec⁴ which takes into account issues related to migration and hidden homelessness.

To that end, this project built on the following objectives:

- Document forms of homelessness present within communities, taking into account the issues related to hidden homelessness and the phenomenon of migration
- Establish a profile of the homeless population in First Nations communities in Quebec using the main determinants of health (e.g. age, gender)
- Identify the contributing factors of homelessness in the communities (e.g. poverty, history of family violence, physical and mental wellness, patterns of alcohol and drug consumption, chronic housing shortage)
- Estimate the extent of homelessness in participating communities

³ Note that this proportion varies by city, but tends to increase markedly in Western Canada. According to different enumeration surveys carried out in Canadian urban centres, Aboriginal people make up more than 90% of the homeless population in some cities, including Yellowknife and Regina (Bélanger et al., 2012).

⁴ This study did not include the Cree Nation, nor the Inuit.

1. RISK FACTORS FOR HOMELESSNESS: LITERATURE REVIEW

The data presented in this section illustrates how First Nations experience a form of economic and social marginalization that heightens their exposure to risk factors associated with becoming and remaining homeless. Compared to the non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people are more at risk for physical and mental health problems, alcoholism and drug addiction, violence and abuse, and are consequently more likely to be incarcerated or placed in foster care as children. These disparities are tied to the unfavourable socioeconomic conditions of First Nations, in particular with respect to income, education and housing. Finally, First Nations are also known to be highly mobile and to engage in migratory patterns to and from the community, which compounds their vulnerability.

This vulnerability is not a matter of chance. Many reasons behind the overexposure of First Nations to risk factors for homelessness can be traced back to a specific historical context. More specifically, to understand Aboriginal homelessness, one must first address the legacy of colonialism and its impact on First Nations.

1.1 COLONIAL LEGACY AND ITS IMPACT ON FIRST NATIONS HOMELESSNESS

Given the economic, social and cultural impacts on First Nations, the political agenda of the colonial system implemented in the 19th century by means of the *Indian Act* (adopted in 1876) cannot be ignored. By creating Indian reserves, the *Indian Act* dispossessed several Aboriginal populations in Canada of their traditional lands and moved them to remote, geographically isolated zones with little economic potential (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Several traditionally nomad Aboriginal peoples were therefore forced to adopt a sedentary way of life without first developing a system of values and knowledge that would have been useful for this lifestyle. In sum, this massive disruption had a significant impact on every aspect of life for First Nations, including housing, diet, education, family, as well as the political structure of these societies.

Through this Act, the Canadian government also became responsible for the education of Aboriginal children, and in the mid-19th century, a vast network of residential schools was put in place. The stated objective of this measure was to assimilate Aboriginal people to the Eurocanadian culture by “killing the Indian in the child.” Until 1985—in other words, for more than a century—thousands of children were uprooted from their families and communities to receive an education that cultivated a cultural and emotional disconnect from their community. These institutions not only force fed Christianity to its wards, but moreover forbid them from speaking their Aboriginal mother tongue.

Residential schools, by promoting the loss of language and culture, are the source of the identity issues that plague First Nations. Several authors point to the concept of “historic trauma” to qualify this situation, which continues to contribute to their marginalization (Patrick, 2015). The literature consulted to produce this portrait recognizes the pervasive effects of the legacy of residential schools on the health and well-being of the individuals who passed through their doors (Milloy, 1999; Menzies, 2009; Reading and Wien, 2009; FNQLHSSC, 2013d) as well as the subsequent generations (Ruttan, LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2010). For example, the proportion of First Nations with suicidal thoughts who did not attend a residential school in their lifetime is 22.0%, whereas this proportion increases to 32.8% among those who did (FNQLHSSC, 2013d).

In its Final Report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognized that many children who attended residential schools were also victims of various abuses and ill treatment (2015). While not all children were victims of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, the negative effects of enduring or witnessing these abuses has nonetheless affected the mental health of a significant number of Aboriginal people (Menzies, 2009). Building on a literature review of the “root causes” of homelessness, Sider (2005) identifies the impacts of residential schools on survivors:

- Sexual abuse: There is extensive literature documenting the long-term impacts of sexual abuse on mental health, such as mistrust, anger, depression, sexual confusion, low self-esteem and difficulty establishing healthy, balanced relationships due to an inability to develop intimacy with others. Sider also points to the development of self-destructive behaviours to “numb the pain,” such as excessive drinking and suicide.
- Spiritual abuse: By converting to Catholicism, the survivors were taught to consider the traditional teachings and practices of their elders as bad and shameful, thereby undermining the cultural and spiritual ties that once held communities together.

In the long term, according to Goffman (1968), attending a “total institution”⁵ fosters the development of an institutional mentality, where living this type of experience diminishes a person’s capacity for self-determination, which, in turn, affects his or her sense of responsibility in adulthood.

Whereas the experience of residential schools constitutes a risk factor for the health of First Nations, the legacy of these schools is also recognized for its impact on successive generations (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005; Sider, 2005; Peters and Robillard, 2009; Peters, 2012; Patrick, 2015). The literature also discusses “intergenerational trauma,” which weakens or destroys cultural reference points and social ties within communities, for instance by impoverishing their mother tongue, undermining the family-oriented culture and compromising bicultural adaptation⁶ (Sider, 2005). Residential schools also fueled a deep-seated distrust of contemporary educational institutions, including both band schools and schools located outside the community. Indeed, the trauma of residential schools experienced by older generations is at the source of the mistrust felt toward the education system and the “lack of parental support” provided to First Nations youths with their studies today (Vinette, 1996, in Girard, LeBlanc et al., 2007). Several researchers have also highlighted the sense that young people have today of “being stuck between two culture” when they reach critical junctures in life. For instance, Aboriginal youths may fear being judged by their peers by pursuing their studies in a system developed by “white people” and in which they may also feel negatively judged due to their cultural origins (Girard, LeBlanc et al., 2007).

Van Gaalen, Wiebe et al. (2009) highlight the importance of considering this “historic trauma” as a key determinant of the health gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. By weakening social and family ties within the communities, the different measures designed

to place First Nations as wards of the state had a negative impact on several generations of individuals, fostering the creation of a “homeless state” (Menziez, 2009, p. 3). The “cultural devaluation” promoted in residential schools also impacted self-esteem. Some researchers have identified the presence of a “negative identity” resulting from the internalization of this cultural devaluation (Smith et al., 2005, in Patrick, 2015).

The closure of the residential schools triggered a wave of child placements in non-Aboriginal foster homes—a de facto extension of the policy to assimilate Aboriginal people (Ruttan et al., 2010; Breton, Dufour et al., 2012). This practice is now known to have created long-term psychological effects on these children. Menziez (2009, p. 3) explains this phenomenon of feeling disconnected from a cultural group using the concept of social anomie. Indeed, by being separated from their family and community, individuals were left with a reduced ability to achieve balance in their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being.

Fast forward to today, and First Nations children continue to be overrepresented in the Canadian and Quebec youth protection systems (De La Sablonnière-Griffin et al., 2016). In addition, the rate of out-community placements (37/1,000) surpasses the rate of in-community placements (24/1,000) (Sinha and Wray, 2015,

On January 27, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that the federal government engaged in “discriminatory” social services practices, and that the funding allocated for young Aboriginal people living in communities was 22% to 34% less than for other Canadian children, resulting in a gap in the services to which they are entitled.

5 Erving Goffman defined the “total institution” as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life (Goffman, 1968).

6 Adaptation to the Aboriginal culture as well as to the culture of the non-Aboriginal society.

in De la Sablonnière-Griffin et al., 2016). According to an analysis of 2005-2006 to 2009-2010 youth centre data, the placement rate for non-agreement First Nations children is four times higher than that for non-Aboriginal children (FNQLHSSC, 2013f)⁷. In other words, there are proportionally more First Nations children who will be placed in care in their life; and indeed, First Nations children make up 10% of the children in care, even though they represent only 2% of the child population in Quebec (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, 2015).

Note that being placed in care during childhood is a risk factor for homelessness in and of itself. At the present time, studies show that between 50% and 75% of all street youths have had some form of “contact” with youth protection services (MSSS, 2010).

As such, the historic trauma caused by the deployment of assimilation policies play a significant role in the identity issues that haunt Aboriginal people in Canada. According to the literature, the internalization of negative representations of their culture combined with limited non-Aboriginal identity reference points generated certain identity problems among First Nations, creating fertile ground for the development of the mental health and addiction problems (Patrick, 2015) often identified by Aboriginal people to explain their trajectory into homelessness (Sider, 2005; Menzies, 2009).

Several authors refer to spiritual homelessness, a state of mind that rests on the difficulty, for First Nations individuals, to welcome modernity while preserving the cultural reference points that are specific to their own people. Coined by Keys (1998) and then adopted by Memmot et al. (2003), spiritual homelessness refers to a state of mind observed

among the Indigenous peoples in Australia with a history of dispossession similar to that experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada. As part of a study on hidden homelessness among the First Nations in Canada, Distasio et al. (2005) qualified spiritual homelessness as a severed link between the individual and his or her traditional land, family and kin. In fact, when a person lacks knowledge or even understanding of how he or she relates to his or her country, family and Aboriginal identity systems, there can be potential repercussions on that person’s mental health (Memmot and Chambers, 2010, in Patrick, 2015).

1.2 Income

In Quebec, as in Canada, the income disparity between First Nations and the non-Aboriginal population has been documented for years. Based on 1996, 2001 and 2006 census data, Penkadur and Penkadur (2013) highlight the presence of a significant income disparity between “Registered Indians” and other Canadians. What’s more, this gap has grown over time, not lessened: for the period from 1981 to 2001, Cooke and Beavon (2007) observed a growing disparity between the average annual income of “Registered Indians” and that of other Canadians. These disparities persist even when individuals achieve levels of high education—an indication of the complexity of factors that continue to underpin their relative poverty.

This income disparity is also observed in Quebec among families with “Aboriginal identity,” who have the lowest total annual (gross) and disposable (net) incomes. In 2007, the average disposable (net) income of Aboriginal families with children was approximately \$11,300 less than that of all Quebec families (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), which was \$62,440 (Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, 2011, p. 24).

Refuge

⁷ Children entrusted to a third party and those placed by First Nations agencies are not included in the data studied. Also, there are grounds to think that the real number of First Nations children placed in different types of care placements is in fact higher.

Based on the primary data collected for the Quebec First Nations Regional Early Childhood, Education and Employment Survey (REEES),⁸ 54% of First Nations adults living in a community are gainfully employed and 38% of households have an annual household income less than \$20,000. According to the Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey (FNQLHSSC, 2013a, p. 21), not only does a significant proportion of First Nations receive social assistance (36%), but, proportionally speaking, more and more First Nations youths are applying for this type of assistance. In fact, in 2008, 66% of youths between the ages of 18 and 24 reported receiving social assistance in the year preceding the survey, as opposed to 40.8% in 2002.⁹ This data attests to the economic insecurity that afflicts First Nations in Quebec who live in their communities.

1.3 Education

In Canada, Aboriginal people attain lower education levels than the rest of the Canadian population (Penkadur and Penkadur, 2013). Similar disparities have been observed in Quebec: for instance, in 2008, 51.5% of First Nations aged 18 years or older had not completed their secondary studies (FNQLHSSC, 2013a), compared to 14.8% of Quebecers aged 25 to 64 years in 2010 (Gauthier, 2014). This situation clearly places First Nations at a disadvantage when seeking employment or developing financial independence (Sider, 2005).

1.4 Housing

First Nations housing conditions are well below general population standards—a phenomenon that has been well documented for years (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; CMHC, 2004; CMHC, 2011; AFNQL, 2014a). The great majority of communities in Quebec (FNQLHSSC, 2013b; AFNQL, 2014a) and Canada (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Peters and Robillard, 2009; Peters, 2012; Patrick, 2015) face issues such as chronic housing shortages that lead to overcrowding, the presence of toxic mold and the lack of affordable housing. Though housing cannot be considered a panacea to the problem of homelessness, it is necessarily a contributing factor to homelessness among First Nations who are particularly affected by this problem. In other words, even though homelessness does not boil down to housing problems, the fact remains that homelessness is always tied to the issue of housing.

By compromising the health and well-being of individuals, the housing crisis contributes to the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Above and beyond the measurable impacts this situation can have on First Nations in Quebec (deterioration of housing stock, increase of financial burden and indebtedness of communities), other less quantifiable consequences must also be taken into consideration:

- individual safety and health problems
- family tensions in the home
- childhood learning difficulties
- weakened sense of belonging to the community (AFNQL, 2014a)

The housing crisis affecting the communities can largely be explained by the presence of a housing funding system that is poorly adapted to the needs of First Nations. The context surrounding the crisis is underpinned by the fact that housing developments in communities do not meet the demographic needs of First Nations (AFNQL, 2014a). In addition, the housing stock generally consists of single family homes (detached and semi-detached), i.e. housing models that are anchored in Western culture and poorly adapted to the needs of First Nations, whose homes tend to group together family members from several generations.

Access to property is moreover severely limited in the communities due to the *Indian Act* (1876), which nullifies the right to seize property on community land. By limiting access to private housing on the territories, this measure undermines the development of housing projects in the community, which largely consists in band council rental housing. Proportionately speaking, in comparison with the general population, more First Nations lease as oppose to own their homes.

Aside from the additional funds invested over the years through non-recurring programs,¹⁰ the base federal housing subsidies allocated to the communities have not increased since 1982 (AFNQL, 2014a). Furthermore, government subsidies have not been indexed, even though the consumer price index over this period increased by 117%. Finally, First Nations in Quebec have experienced more rapid demographic growth than the Quebec population, which has exacerbated housing needs. In sum, the federal programs, which assume primary responsibility for First Nations housing, have failed to meet the communities' demographic needs (FNQLHSSC, 2013b; AFNQL, 2014a).

⁸ Survey led by the FNQLHSSC. Data collection took place between December 2013 and March 2015.

⁹ Data taken from the Surveillance Plan of Health Status and its Determinants for the First Nations of Quebec: <https://www2.cssspnql.com/PlanSurveillance/login.aspx>.

¹⁰ Non-recurrent programs include the 1996 New Housing Approach (\$24 M envelope), the 2005 Housing Initiative (\$6.2 M envelope), the 2008 New Regional Approach to Housing (\$1 M envelope) and the 2009 Canada's Economic Action Plan (\$14.4 M envelope). These additional measures injected a total \$45.6 M into communities in Quebec (AFNQL, 2014a, p.28).

Finally, there is little data on the community-specific “affordability”¹¹ of housing due to the lack of information on housing and housing-related costs on these territories as well as the complexity of housing allocation programs (FNQLHSSC, 2013b, p. 14). It is shown, however, that 12.8% of households in Aboriginal communities occupy dwellings that fail to meet size and quality standards, and are moreover unable to afford “acceptable” housing (CMHC, 2004).

1.5 Physical and mental health

The relationship between health and homelessness is complex insofar as it is bidirectional. Just as health problems may contribute to leading a person down the path of homelessness, difficult life conditions experienced during a situation of homelessness can result in health problems (Patrick, 2015).

In fact, individuals who remain homeless over more or less prolonged periods of time become more likely to experience a decline in physical and mental health, which in turn leads to high rates of health care utilization, particularly in terms of emergency services, hospitalization and visits to the doctor (Gaetz, 2012).

Living in substandard housing or in places not intended for human habitation, poor dietary habits and chronic sleep deprivation—realities that characterize homelessness—are likely to exacerbate existing health problems or lead to their onset. Common health problems afflicting the homeless include chilblains, chronic infections such as the cold and flu, nutritional deficiencies, hypothermia or heat stroke, dermatological diseases, such as bacterial or fungal infections affect the skin or feet, as well as circulatory problems (MSSS, 2008). In addition, as these people have little control over their diet, homelessness can also lead to very severe health complications for people with diabetes, a chronic illness that markedly affects First Nations. Finally, homeless people are 29 times more likely to have Hepatitis C (Khandor and Mason, 2007, in Gaetz, 2012).

Similarly, homelessness is also associated with mental health problems. On the one hand, homeless people are more at risk of development mental health problems as a result of their overexposure to physical and sexual violence (Gaetz 2012) as well as to the stress stemming from the chronic insecurity of their situation. On the other hand, however, experiencing domestic or conjugal violence is also a risk factor for homelessness, namely due to the impact this type of trauma can have on the mental health of victims (Sider, 2005). Indeed, women who are victims of domestic violence and children who are victims of abuse tend

to leave the family home (Birdsall-Jones, Corunna et al., 2010), leading to residential instability. As underscored by the General Social Survey, in 2009, there were almost two times more Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people to report an incident of domestic violence (assault or sexual assault) in the previous five years (Statistics Canada, 2009). In addition, Aboriginal victims were more likely to report severe forms of domestic violence, as opposed to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

1.6 Judicialization

As with physical and mental health, the relationship between homelessness and judicialization is also bidirectional. By fostering residential instability, incarceration may have a direct link with homelessness. Based on an analysis of factors that may lead Aboriginal people to become homeless in Ontario, Sider (2005) observed that, lacking the necessary resources, people are sometimes unable to return to their community after being released from jail. Indeed, individuals are generally transferred to the location where the arrest took place following their release—which can be in an urban environment, far from their community. Once released, these individuals may also be shunned from their communities due to the nature of the crime they committed, further compromising their social reinsertion.

What’s more, the homeless are more at risk of incarceration than people living in suitable housing as they are subject to profiling and other local criminalization practices, such as issuing fines for infractions related to incivility (Bellot and Sylvestre, 2012; Gaetz, 2012). Studies have shown that such practices have the effect of increasing the debt burden of individuals, which in turns creates a major obstacle for finding suitable housing (Gaetz, 2012). Finally, note that for some people who have no place to sleep in the winter, committing misdemeanors that carry jail sentences are part of their survival strategy.

In sum, there is a clear connection between homelessness and judicialization. This relationship is also a driver of different forms of public spending (e.g. police force, engagement in the court and criminal justice system), resulting in significant financial costs for society. In 2010-2011, the average daily cost for a provincial inmate (non-violent crimes) was \$171 (Dauvergne, 2012).

¹¹ According to the CMHC, a household is said to be “in core housing need if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards, and it would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax income to pay the median rent or alternative local housing that is acceptable (meets all three standards)” (CMHC, 2004, p. 2). Due to the specific characteristics of band housing, the data on on-reserve housing costs were not collected during the Canadian census.

1.7 Alcoholism and drug addiction

The research is clear: Alcoholism and drug addiction are strongly associated with homelessness in general (Patrick, 2015). Indeed, addiction problems are known to promote individual disorganization, which can hasten a person's decline into a situation of homelessness.

Although the proportion of alcohol drinkers among First Nations is smaller than that of Quebecers in general, the opposite holds true with respect to excessive alcohol consumption (FNQLHSSC, 2013e). Other research has found a higher rate of drug use among First Nations than Quebecers (Cazale and Leclerc, 2010). Indeed, 40.1% of First Nations aged 12 years or older who live in a community reported using drugs (all drugs combined), compared with 13.1% of Quebecers aged 15 years or older (FNQLHSSC, 2013e).

Alcoholism and drug addiction is also associated with mental health problems, such as psychological distress, mood or anxiety disorders and suicidal behaviour (FNQLHSSC, 2013e). Substance use by people with a mental health problem (comorbidity) is a serious problem that stakeholders who work with homeless people are familiar with. Comorbidities are a major challenge for professionals who work with the homeless to try to diagnose a health condition in order to better adapt interventions.

1.8 Migratory patterns

The research shows that Aboriginal people in Canada are highly mobile (AANDC, 2013)—even more mobile than the general Canadian population (CMHC, 1996; Norris and Clatworthy, 2003). First Nations in Quebec do not appear to be exempt from this phenomenon: nearly half of respondents, that is, 45.5%, reported having already lived outside of their community (FNQLHSSC, 2013c). Among this people, 13.2% had already left their community to live in another.

Migrants cited work and studies as the main reasons for leaving the community; and family and culture, for their return (Girard, LeBlanc et al., 2007; FNQLHSSC, 2013c). As such, the phenomenon of migration is a symptom of the difficult life conditions of First Nations. Faced with the stagnation of the economic and social situation on the reserves, “many Aboriginal people have been leaving their community in the hope of improving their lives” (RCAAQ, 2008, p. 9).

However, a number of difficulties await Aboriginal people in the city. Some authors underscore the significant role of social isolation, that is, “a lack of contact or of sustained interaction with the individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society,” on the integration of First Nations who migrate to an urban area (Norris and Clatworthy, 2003). Other authors claim that these migrations to urban centres may create a cultural and social shock for First Nations individuals, for instance due to the loss of cultural markers and distance from family (Wente, 2000, in Distasio et al., 2005; FNQLHSSC, 2013c). Compounded by the discrimination they sometimes face, these elements exacerbate the economic and social marginalization of First Nations outside of their communities (Norris and Clatworthy, 2003). For instance, due to the presence of prejudice or absence of credit history, some landlords refuse to lease housing to First Nations families.

In sum, people leave their communities to improve their living conditions (RCAAQ, 2008; FNQLHSSC, 2013c), but return to maintain their social ties. What's more, the high migration rates observed among First Nations as well as the obstacles individuals face when they leave their communities place them at a higher risk for experiencing a period of homelessness at some point in their lives.

This section broke down the important gaps between First Nations and non-Aboriginals with respect to health determinants that constitute risk factors for homelessness as well as underscored the role played by the colonial legacy in the cultivation of these gaps. Other than the disparities observed in income and education, several studies over the years have also been able to demonstrate that the housing conditions of First Nations are well below the standards enjoyed by non-Aboriginals. It is also recognized that there is a higher prevalence of problems related to physical and mental health and addiction among First Nations in Quebec. Finally, these disparities also materialize in the higher mobility of First Nations that also stems from the difficult living conditions in the communities, which may in turn compound their vulnerability when they reach in urban centres.

These risk factors, however, do not constitute an exhaustive list of the elements that may foster the phenomenon of homelessness among First Nations. Nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, these elements are more likely to mutually impact each other. The root causes of homelessness are generally varied and complex, as they are based on a combination of factors and key events that have marked an individual in the course of his or her lifetime (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005).

2. ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology used to create this portrait. More specifically, it relies on a collaboration method designed to integrate the viewpoints of the research community and First Nations into the portrait's underlying reflection process. This section also presents the data collection strategy, the sampling of participating communities and respondents for data collection purposes, as well as the ethical considerations that guided their participation. Finally, this section explains the method used to process and analyse the collected data, as well as validate results.

2.1 A collaborative approach between first nations and the research community

This research was conducted in compliance with the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador's Research Protocol (AFNQL, 2014b) and the OCAP® principles of ownership, control, access and possession. In order to integrate the scientific and experiential knowledge relevant to the phenomenon of homelessness in the context of First Nations communities, every step in the process was discussed with an Advisory Committee created to support the portrait. This Committee comprised actors from the research and intervention sectors, and included First Nations. The active and early participation of First Nations in the Advisory Committee—including for defining objectives—was critical in identifying not only local issues associated with First Nations homelessness, but also shared First Nations values which could have an impact on the phenomenon of homelessness.

The tacit and explicit knowledge shared among Committee members played an essential role in developing an accurate portrait of homelessness in the communities. This diversity of knowledge was taken into account while planning this research project, from defining objectives to analyzing the data collected and disseminating research findings. Collaboration was key as it integrated several perspectives and allowed a “two-eyed seeing” approach on the research topic (AFNQL, 2014b).

2.2 Data collection method

Owing to the lack of documentation on the issue of homelessness in a community context, a quantitative data collection survey was conducted in First Nations communities. This is the recommended method for data collection for purposes of exploratory research.

The principal strategy for data collection for this portrait was semi-structured interviews¹² (individuals and groups) with resource persons who work for band councils and intervene, either directly or indirectly, with people who are at risk of homelessness or are homeless on their territory. This strategy gives respondents room to discuss what they feel is important. It also makes it possible to further explore elements of the interview that require greater nuance to avoid confusion. Interviews were also conducted with people working in organizations offering services to First Nations in urban areas. Interviews were conducted over the phone in order to take up as little of the respondents' time as possible, with the exception of the in-person interviews conducted as discussion groups in Mashteuiatsh, Wendake and Listuguj. Finally, two group interviews were conducted over the phone with respondents from the communities of Kitigan Zibi and Timiskaming.

As service offers are adapted on a community basis, respondents were identified using the “snowball” sampling technique, which consists in selecting individuals using referrals from relevant stakeholders. This technique is particularly useful for recruiting respondents that are difficult to identify, for instance due to the different functions they fulfill (Pires, 1997). Most of the respondents solicited for data collection were resource persons. As mentioned, this category of respondent was chosen because of their knowledge of the main characteristics of people at risk of homelessness or in a situation of homelessness. Finally, this data collection served to identify the levers and obstacles to preventing homelessness and providing support to homeless people.

Seasons

¹² See Appendix 1 for the interview guide for resource persons.

Trauma

Abuse

Poverty

Individual

Family

Mobility

Refuge

Finally, two semi-structured interviews¹³ were also conducted with homeless individuals who have personally experienced homelessness in their community in order to achieve a better understanding of their trajectories and obstacles. These interviews made it possible to study the phenomenon in greater depths by incorporating the meaning ascribed by these individuals to their own experiences (Poupart, 1997).

2.3 Community sampling

A memo¹⁴ dated October 19, 2015, was sent to the First Nations communities in Quebec¹⁵ as well as to the network of Native Friendship Centres in Quebec to inform the sector about the project and the forthcoming data collection survey. In order to obtain the most complete community representation possible, these same communities were sent an invitation letter,¹⁶ dated November 24, 2015, addressed to the chiefs of 28 communities,¹⁷ and accompanied by a consent form. Among the solicited communities, 17 completed the consent form, duly signed by the chiefs or grand chiefs, and accepted the invitation. It was important to obtain the consent of the communities before reaching out to resource persons; indeed, this step was critical to the success of the data collection survey as it laid the foundation for fruitful collaboration with the communities.

Semi-structured interviews and discussion groups were held in 13 communities (including three English-speaking communities) spread out over the four zones of geographic isolation¹⁸ developed by INAC¹⁹ (see Table 1). Not all the communities that accepted the invitation participated in the data collection survey due to the difficulty in obtaining the free and informed consent of respondents.

¹³ See Appendix 2 for the interview guide for homeless individuals.

¹⁴ See Appendix 3 for the memo.

¹⁵ Except for the Cree Nation and the Inuit.

¹⁶ See Appendix 4 for the letter.

¹⁷ The communities of Hunter's Point (Algonquin), Cacouna and Withworth (Malecite), Coucoucache (Atikamekw) and Gespeg (Mi'kmaq) were excluded from the sampling due to insufficient residents on these territories.

¹⁸ These zones are defined based on a zone system developed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) to categorize the degree of geographic isolation experienced by the communities. There are four distinct zones under this system:

Zone 1 (urban): The community is located within 50 km of the nearest service centre with year-round road access.

Zone 2 (rural): The community is located between 50 and 350 km of the nearest service centre with year-round road access.

Zone 3 (remote): The community is located over 350 km from the nearest service centre with year-round road access.

Zone 4 (special access): The community has no year-round road access to a service centre.

Service centre: The nearest location where the community members must go in order to access service providers, banks and government services.

¹⁹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2000). Band Classification Manual. Ottawa, INAC.

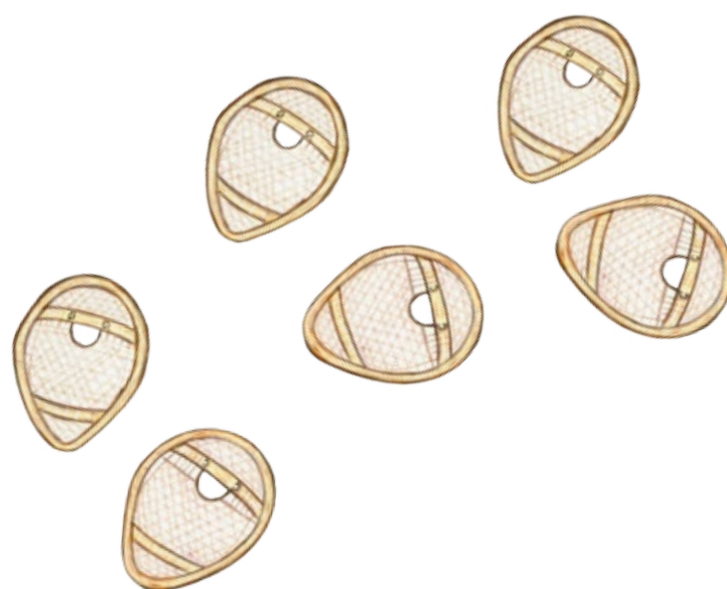


TABLE 1: LIST OF PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES, BY GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION* AND NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

Participating community	People interviewed	Residents**
Urban zone (Zone 1) – 6/15 non-agreement, inhabited communities		
Kitigan Zibi (Algonquin)	5 resource persons	1,582
Listuguj (Mi'kmaq)	4 resource persons	2,049
Mashteuiatsh (Innu)	6 resource persons	2,042
Pessamit (Innu)	1 resource person	2,862
Timiskaming (Algonquin)	2 resource persons	584
Wendake (Huron-Wendat)	2 resource persons	1,528
Rural zone (Zone 2) – 3/7 non-agreement, inhabited communities		
Kitcisakik (Algonquin)	1 resource person	397
Manawan (Atikamekw)	1 resource person	2,299
Ekuanitshit (Innu)	1 resource person	570
Remote zone (Zone 3) – 2/2 non-agreement, inhabited communities		
Nutashkuan (Innu)	1 resource person	973
Opitciwan (Atikamekw)	1 resource person	2,309
Special access zone (Zone 4) – 2/3 non-agreement, inhabited communities		
Matimekush (Innu)	1 resource person	783
Pakua Shipu (Innu)	1 resource person	338
Total	13 communities	27 respondents

* Data from the Band Classification Manual, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2000).

** Data from The Nations Map 2016, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

2.4 Respondent sampling

A total of 27 resource persons and two homeless individuals participated in the development of the portrait, either in the context of individual or group interviews. For the most part, resource persons were identified with the collaboration of the health and social services directors in the participating communities. The resource persons who made up this sampling of respondents represent varied professional sectors and communities, such as social welfare (income security), housing, health, social services as well as social development (see Table 2). The variety of reported professions made it possible to cover a large spectrum of themes related to homelessness in the communities.



TABLE 2: LIST OF JOB TITLES REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS

Social development, health and social services	
• Community organizers (2 men) • Community services supervisor (1 man) • Community and cultural services coordinator (1 man) • Workforce advisor (1 man) • Reception (intake), evaluation, referral and orientation agent (1 woman) • Coordinator of a meeting place (1 man) • Life skills educator (1 woman) • Nurse (1 woman) • Crisis management coordinator (1 man)	• Addiction workers or NNADAP officers (2 women, 2 men) • Psychologists (2 men) • Outreach workers (1 man, 1 woman) • Shelter worker for victims of domestic violence (1 woman) • Prevention officer (family) (1 man) • Mental health advisors (1 woman, 1 man) • Supervisor of frontline services (1 man)
Social welfare	Housing
• Supervisor (1 man) • Income security agents (1 man, 1 woman)	• Housing coordinator (1 woman)

The two homeless people interviewed were men between the ages of 40 and 50 and the fathers of at least three children. Neither respondent exercised custody at the time of the interview, notably due to their instability. These two respondents differed from each other in terms of the form of homelessness they were currently experiencing (hidden homelessness and visible homelessness) and life course.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The individual consent of respondents was obtained prior to the interviews in order to make sure they had a full understanding of the project's objectives and the terms of data collection (confidentiality and anonymity). As with the solicited communities, the resource persons (principal respondents of the study) were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. This step also served to inform respondents of their rights, including their right to withdraw their consent at any time and without prejudice, as well as their rights with respect to the confidential nature of their participation.²⁰

To ensure the quality of respondent sampling and, therefore, the richness of the information collected, all resource persons were asked to consult the interview guide prior to the interviews.

The data collected will be preserved by the FNQLHSSC for a period of five years following the end of the project.

2.6 Interview processing and analysis

Almost all the interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word in order to faithfully represent the observations made during the discussion. The purpose of this information processing technique is to go beyond the immediate impressions the interviewer takes away from the interview, which may not correspond to what the respondent was actually saying (Revillard, 2008). This technique also served to corroborate the results using quotes from the respondents. The interviews were analyzed using the NVivo 10 quantitative data analysis software to identify the relevant information in keeping with the portrait's objectives.

2.7 Validation

The members of the Advisory Committee and participating communities were then asked to validate the results of the analysis. This validation process is critical, as it significantly reduces the risk of incorrect interpretations, in particular those resulting from cultural biases.

²⁰ See Appendix 5 for the consent form.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The overexposure of First Nations to the risk factors of homelessness and the many impacts of the colonial legacy on community development justify the importance of approaching and reflecting on homelessness from a perspective that reflects the experience of First Nations. First, this section will break down the definition of homelessness retained for this project. Second, it will present the different forms of homelessness found to be at play in First Nations communities in Quebec, and which were discussed in the interviews with respondents during data collection.

3.1 Definition

People in situations of homelessness are a heterogeneous, complex group (Distasio et al., 2005). In order to focus this reflection, it was crucial that the definition adopted be fairly inclusive to account for the diversity of situations that fall under the category of homelessness. According to Gaetz et al. (2014, p. 42), a person is said to be “at-risk” of homelessness if “their current housing situation lacks security or stability.” It would be ill-advised to approach the question of homelessness without also approaching the risks of homelessness, as the latter serves to consider the elements that cultivate the vulnerability of people to homelessness. In fact, the knowledge of these conditions is instrumental to developing a strategy to prevent homelessness.

The Canadian Homelessness Research Network’s definition of homelessness is broad enough to allow for the diversity in individual housing conditions, while also placing the emphasis on the systemic and individual barriers faced by people faced with this problem:

“[...] the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.”²¹

The Canadian Homelessness Research Network also notes that homelessness does not constitute a static state, insofar as an individual can experience different kinds of shelter experiences over a more or less prolonged period of time. These findings are in keeping with the observations made by the resource persons in the communities, which indicate that, for several individuals, the experience of homelessness can take different forms in the course of a single year, especially with respect to the seasons. In sum, this definition offers an appropriate framework for studying the different forms of homelessness found in First Nations communities.

3.2 Interview strategies

During the interviews, respondents were questioned on the presence of homeless people in their community. To make sure resource persons included all the potential categories of homelessness on their territory, these were presented during the introduction to each interview. The identification of these categories was inspired by the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). This typology is recognized for covering all situations that constitute homelessness across Europe, and is used to support data collection, research and policy development to combat housing-related exclusion.

However, the operational categories in this tool based on situations that are much less likely in a community context were not brought up during the interviews (see Table 3). In addition, some of the elements that were not part of the original typology were added to the tool in order to account for situations that were more likely in a community context. Specifically, people in emergency shelters, in homeless shelters or shelters for recent immigrants, and former homeless people receiving longer-term support were excluded from this tool due to the absence of these types of services in the communities. The category of people living under threat of eviction was also excluded, as including it would have required more information from various actors (notably the police force, band council housing services and private homeowners) as well as additional time and significantly more resources than were available for this project. Finally, certain conceptual categories were included in the portrait’s conceptual framework to facilitate an understanding of the forms of homelessness and housing-related exclusion. For comparison purposes, see the original ETHOS typology²² in Appendix 6.

²¹ Definition taken from the website of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN): <http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf> (consulted October 21, 2015).

²² ETHOS (2007). European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion: <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en> (consulted March 22, 2016).

TABLE 3: EUROPEAN TYPOLOGY ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION ADAPTED TO SITUATIONS OF HOMELESSNESS EXPERIENCED IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN QUEBEC

Conceptual category	Operational category	Generic definition
Roofless (visible homelessness)	People living rough	Living in the streets, in public spaces, without accommodations
	People living in places not intended for human habitation	Living in garages, sheds, tents, makeshift shelters, cars, etc. (in the forest or on inhabited territory)*
Houseless	People due to be released from institutions	- No housing available prior to release from penal institutions, hospital stays or treatment/rehabilitation centres - No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)
	People living in insecure accommodation (couchsurfers)	People accommodated for a short period of time due to domestic abuse
Insecure housing (hidden homelessness)	People living in insecure accommodation (couchsurfers)	- Provisionally accommodated by family or friends due to the lack of a permanent place to live - No lease (lease or sublease)
Inadequate housing (hidden homelessness)	People living in unfit housing	Subquality dwelling that seriously compromises the health and/or safety of its occupants
	People living in extreme overcrowding	- Living in housing where the ratio of occupation is well in excess of one person per room - Overcrowding fosters social tensions inside the household

* Excludes people who, by choice, live in a forest camp and according to an organized lifestyle that is inspired by traditional First Nations culture.

During the interviews, for each of these forms of homelessness, the resource persons were asked to share their knowledge of the socioeconomic profiles of the affected individuals as well as the underlying reasons for their loss of housing or the persistence of these living conditions. Migration patterns, which can also influence the phenomenon of homelessness, were also addressed in the context of the individuals' motivations and the possible impacts of migration on situations of homelessness. Finally, the interviews were an opportunity to confirm the existence of quantitative data in the communities (or lack thereof) and to record the respondents impressions on the scale of the form of homelessness in question.

Insecure housing

4. PORTRAIT OF HOMELESSNESS IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

This section covers the different forms of homelessness found in First Nations communities, based on the information collected from the respondents in participating communities as well as the information brought to light during the literature review.

Each form of homelessness discussed in this section includes information on the principal health determinants of affected individuals, the factors that may explain why individuals may become or remain homeless, and the scale of the phenomenon in participating communities.

4.1 Hidden homelessness

Hidden homelessness is a particularly relevant concept to study the specific makeup of this phenomenon in the communities, especially due to the housing crisis, which plays a significant role. The documentation consulted revealed that definitions for hidden homelessness vary greatly. Some authors limit the definition to individuals living temporarily with friends, family or even strangers and who have no security of tenure (Eberle, Kraus et al., 2009; Peters, 2012). According to Gaetz et al. (2014, p. 39), hidden homelessness (or couchsurfing) refers to people who “stay temporarily with acquaintances, friends or family,

Existence of data on insecure housing (couchsurfing)

At this point in time, there are no reliable sources of data to estimate the number of hidden homeless in First Nations communities in Quebec (Eberle, Kraus et al., 2009). Although few of the studies consulted focused on hidden homelessness, there was a widespread call for further research on this issue. Distasio et al. (2005) examined the characteristics, circumstances and contributing factors of hidden homelessness among First Nations in Canadian prairie cities. A few enumeration surveys were also completed in British Columbia (Eberle, Kraus et al., 2009; Graham, 2011). These enumeration surveys shared the same data collection strategy, that is, randomize telephone surveys.

with no immediate prospect of getting their own place, knowing they might be kicked out at any time.” Other authors, however, include in their definitions situations of inadequate housing (substandard housing or housing that requires major repairs) or extreme overcrowding (see Eberle et al., 2009; Turcotte, 2015; Homeless Hub). These situations have therefore been included in this portrait as they translate particularly widespread social and community realities among First Nations.

Hidden homelessness remains invisible due to the overall absence of these people in public spaces and admitted into the service structure for the roofless. The hidden homeless live in inadequate or insecure housing, and as such have different needs than those who live on the streets and are visibly homeless. Although they have a roof over their heads, the hidden homeless don’t have a real “home,” i.e. a safe place to call their own where they can enjoy some privacy, relax and cultivate relationships (Peters, 2012; Patrick, 2015).

4.1.1 Insecure housing (or couchsurfing)

Given that such accommodation opportunities are often temporary, people with insecure housing (or couchsurfers) develop survival strategies that consist in multiplying the number of places where they can sleep. Insecure housing is therefore characterized by constant mobility and frequent moves:

“I go to, like, another house, my cousin’s house. Like we’re family, here, like, everywhere, and I got family [outside the community] and other reserves, I’ll sleep wherever, like, I used ‘couchsurf’ last year at this time. So this time, this year, I got a basement, so I put up like, there’s sheets all around, my bed, the TV.” (Homeless individual, Zone 1)

Peters’ research (2012) on the strategies used to maintain good relationships with hosts illustrates this key aspect of mobility for people with insecure housing, as well as the stress that accompanies this lifestyle. Some people never stay longer than a few consecutive weeks in a given place, for instance due to their drinking or substance abuse patterns or that of their hosts. Others minimize their presence as much as possible so as to not be in the way, help with housekeeping or pitch in financially. Essentially, the hidden homeless deploy a range of strategies to stay in their hosts’ good graces so that they can come back in the more or less distant future.

According to respondents, individuals with insecure housing often do not seek services in the community: “These people don’t necessary go through reception services. They will find their own solutions.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

4.1.1.1 Profile of at-risk individuals

According to the resource persons, insecure housing in the communities appears to affect single men between the ages of 18 and 40 to a much greater extent than women. The reasons cited to explain this gender-based imbalance are hinged on the fact that when a couple separates, it is usually the man who leaves the domicile to his spouse, who will remain there with the children. Women are also less likely to use this strategy because they face a higher risk for sexual exploitation when they move from one place to the next:

“[...] what with the drinking, drug use, etc., when you sleep in an overcrowded space, there’s a risk of abuse. And as a result, if you’re not in your own environment, and even if you’re with extended family and sharing a house with people you are more or less related to, etc., you become more vulnerable to sexual abuse.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

Women may occasionally adopt this housing strategy to escape situations of domestic abuse, but only temporarily. The respondents qualified this type of homelessness as situational, insofar as these episodes of insecure housing are not recurrent. As such, the life events that leave people homeless due to domestic violence will be covered in greater depth in section 4.3.2.

4.1.1.2 Contributing factors

The factors mentioned by the resource persons to explain loss of housing or the continued reliance of individuals on insecure housing primarily relate to addiction to drugs/alcohol and mental health issues. For example, some people are evicted from their homes by family after episodes of violence and consumption, but do not necessarily lose their support network (often extended family).

Aside from addiction and mental health problems that foster individual “disorganization,” the life course of these individuals is often punctuated by violence or neglect in childhood or the death of a family member who was the “pillar” of the family unit. This was the case for Travis (fictional name), an individual with insecure housing who was interviewed in the context of this portrait:

“My mom passed away, and I just stayed with my dad, below poverty line. We had an apartment, but there was no furniture. But I still managed to go to school. [...] survival, that’s what it is, and that’s what it has always been since my mother passed away. It’s survival.” (Homeless individual, Zone 1)

Among First Nations, housing-related responsibilities—such as maintenance and budgeting for necessary expenses—are often assumed by the person who constitutes the “pillar” of the family. In a context where access to housing is difficult and results in overcrowding, not everyone has the opportunity to develop the generic competencies required to remain housed.

It is also interesting to note that homelessness, according to some respondents, is related to lifestyles that are passed on from generation to generation.

“Then, it gets passed on from one generation to the next: disadvantaged area, drug addiction, alcoholism, mental health, abandonment, you name it. They’ve been immersed in these issues for so long, and at some point, they end up on the streets. [...] And like with anything else, when you receive a certain education, this is all you know, you can’t learn another way to live. [...] the education you get programs you for the type of life you’re likely to adopt later on.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

This was corroborated by the experiences reported by the two homeless individuals interviewed for this project.

While relying on temporary accommodations in one’s social network is a strategy used to avoid the streets, it is important to view this situation as part of a larger cycle or life course, and not as a static situation. Indeed, according to the respondents, the hidden homeless often end up on the street come spring. In other words, it would be misguided to consider the visibly homeless as a completely distinct group of individuals from those with insecure housing, as the latter tend to experience more than one form of homelessness throughout the year.

According to Distasio et al. (2005), the support of extended family and the social network are inherent components of First Nations value systems. To point, a study completed among Australia’s Indigenous population revealed they saw little distinction between putting up visitors who had a home of their own and providing accommodations for a member of the extended family in a situation of homelessness (Birdsall-Jones et al., 2010). Indeed, this sense of solidarity is responsible for keeping several individuals off the streets (albeit without an actual home to call their own), and contributes to reducing the visibility of Aboriginal homeless (Distasio et al., 2005).

According to respondents, although insecure housing in the communities is fueled by the blatant lack of housing, this phenomenon is also the result of the high sense of solidarity exhibited by the extended families of First Nations. This sense of solidarity does, however, have limits; in other words, accommodations may be offered, but perhaps in exchange for a financial contribution and/or services.

“You need to understand that without this kind of mutual help, there would be a lot more actual homeless people.” (Resource person, Zone 3)

“A lot of people help each other out. And that’s where you have to draw certain parallels or make distinctions. There’s not much room for individualism, or there’s much less room for individualism in a community than, let’s say, in a city or a larger village.” (Resource person, Zone 2)

“I find that family values play a big role among the Innu, because no one, ever, will see someone out there and let them sleep outside. They’ll say, ‘come in’.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

The importance of this sense of solidarity is probably tied to the absence of the notion of property in traditional First Nations culture, which in turn and in part explains how people view housing:

Family

"I often hear people saying, 'My things don't belong to me. If there's a place in the house that's just mine, if I have my own room but don't put a lock on the door, then I'll end up with no more socks, no more pants, no more...' And this will be viewed both as sharing and theft. [...] The boundaries aren't clear. Some people experience this as theft, whereas others will tolerate it. And others still will put locks on their doors." (Resource person, Zone 2)

4.1.1.3 Scale of phenomenon

Based on the information gathered during the interviews, the phenomenon of insecure housing in the communities appears to be more widespread than that of homelessness. The respondents qualified this situation as "very frequent" within one community, "frequent" in seven communities, and "rarely" in three communities.²³ Most respondents reported not being comfortable with estimating the current number of

people with insecure housing. However, respondents for the most part agreed that the reason behind the rise in this form of homelessness resided in the fact that housing stock development did not keep up with the communities' demographic needs.

Of the two homeless individuals interviewed for this portrait, one had experienced a life course with many of the characteristic obstacles inherent to insecure housing. The textbox below presents a brief overview of his trajectory.

4.1.2 Unfit housing

Despite having a place to sleep at night, some people do not have access to safe and secure housing that would allow them to thrive as individuals. This section covers situations where people's accommodations threaten their health and/or safety.

TRAVIS' STORY

Travis [fictional name], the father of four children from as many relationships, has been staying with a cousin who lives with his spouse and their child for about 8 months. In exchange for chipping in financially and helping with a few household chores, Travis can sleep in their basement. A few sheets have been hung from the ceiling to give him a bit of privacy in the room that he also uses for storage. Even though it isn't a place he can call his own, he's happy to have a space to spend time with one of his children during the weekend.

Before moving into his cousin's place, Travis leased small studio-type apartments in a city near the community. However, Travis would eventually get evicted because he had difficulty meeting his lease-related obligations (paying rent, electricity bills, etc.).

When asked about how he ended up in this situation, Travis says things took a turn for him when he was 15 years old (i.e. 17 years ago), after the death of his mother in a fire that destroyed the family home. This is when Travis began experiencing what would turn out to be a long period of residential instability that had persisted until the time of the interview. At first, he moved in with an uncle who often drank; during this time, Travis frequently went without food, hot water and electricity. This food and housing insecurity proved too big an obstacle for Travis, so he dropped out of secondary school to go live with his father in Ontario. Unfortunately, this move didn't help Travis' situation, as he experienced the same type of insecurity with his father. In fact, Travis moved several times during this period in his life.

Since coming back to the community, Travis' trajectory has been marked by long periods of homelessness, punctuated by a few short periods of residential stability in which he lived with his spouses. As a welfare recipient, Travis often turns to food assistance services offered in the community to feed himself. Despite his repeated requests to the band council for community housing, Travis has little hope of getting what he needs.

Travis has been sober for several (about eight) years, but says he smokes marijuana a few times per month. Travis suffers from asthma and arthritis, and reports the pain has been getting worse in the last few years.

Finally, if he had a "magic wand" that allowed him to change something in his life, Travis said he would complete his studies to try and get suitable employment. He fears that his lifestyle has a negative influence on his children, who could follow in his footsteps. His biggest wish is to see his children thrive in life.

²³ Some respondents found it difficult to estimate the scale of the different forms of homelessness. As a result, the information presented in this portrait does not always relate to all of the 13 participating communities.

4.1.2.1 Profile of at-risk individuals

According to respondents, unfit housing disproportionately affects young families and households where there is drinking or drug use. This phenomenon not only affects private homes, but also band housing, due to the occupants' lack of maintenance and care.

Based on the interviews, the most widespread cause of unfit housing in communities is without a doubt mold problems, which, of note, can impact the health of occupants and place them at risk of developing respiratory problems or aggravating pre-existing conditions:

"[...] some of the houses are only a few years old, and with the moisture, and that, they don't invest in a proper, like, dehumidifier, or something, so, instead of putting money towards that, and then they end up not too long after that, the house that starts to retain mold. Or other living conditions that cause, like, [name of colleague] said, bad hygiene, and stuff like that." (Resource person, Zone 1)

According to the literature, living in contaminated housing presents a significant health risk for occupants, particularly children (AFNQL, 2014a, p. 19). Significantly, unsuitable housing not only leads to health problems for occupants, but can also exacerbate pre-existing medical conditions (Patrick, 2015).

4.1.2.2 Contributing factors

Based on the information collected from the interviews and the literature review, the mold problem is particularly widespread in First Nations communities due to overcrowding as well as subquality housing. More than one-third of First Nations living in a community were living in housing with traces of mold (FNQLHSSC, 2013b, p. 34). Even new constructions may show traces of mold due to defects. Indeed, not all communities inspect the quality of recent constructions, fueling the early onset of unfit housing conditions.

According to the resource persons, there are cases where private houses were condemned by the band council for health and safety reasons, but remained occupied due to the housing shortage on the territory. In these cases, the owners continued renting out houses with no heating or running water, despite the band council's ban.

4.1.2.3 Scale of phenomenon

For information purposes, based on the 2012 data collected from the ten First Nations in Quebec and Labrador, in addition to "official sources," the AFNQL (2014a) established that 16% of the housing stock of First Nations in Quebec required major renovations due to poor construction quality (age of houses), deficient maintenance, abusive usage and other physical factors (pp. 17-18). According to the FNQLHSSC, 27.5% of First Nations live in housing that requires major repairs (FNQLHSSC, 2013b, p. 31), a finding which is cause for particular concern. According to the same resource, some First Nations are especially affected by unfit housing conditions, namely, the Atikamekw (46.9%), the Mohawk (46.1%), the Naskapi (35.7%) and the Innu (27.1%). Finally, the housing of a large proportion of people living in band housing requires major repairs.

First Nations are particularly vulnerable to unfit housing due to the deficient maintenance of the housing stock in the communities, as well as to the difficult living conditions in these areas. Respondents from eight communities addressed the issue of unfit housing; of these, seven communities were said to be affected by this phenomenon (in one community, one respondent reported not being aware of this presence of this issue). The respondents from these communities estimated that there were approximately between five and ten such houses on each territory.

Given the specific context of each community, a great deal of care must be exercised when interpreting situations of unfit housing. For example, not all communities have equal access to electricity. Consequently, some communities heat primarily using firewood, and the dry air created by this heating method is known to negatively impact the health and well-being of occupants. The lack of utilities in some communities can also negatively impact individuals with a fragile health, such as elders. Thus faced with difficult living conditions and the inherent risks to their health, people are sometimes forced to leave the community in the winter and stay temporarily with members of their family who live in housing that is connected to all the necessary utilities. Consequently, it would be misguided to classify these people as homeless, as these situations can reflect common lifestyles in a given community.

4.1.3 Extreme overcrowding

Basing itself on a study on the causes of family homelessness, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) highlights that the lack of affordable housing places families at risk of homelessness (CMHC, 2003). Several authors have also observed growing shortages of affordable housing in First Nations communities (Patrick, 2015).

According to the CMHC's Canadian housing standards, overcrowding is generally established when the person-to-room ratio exceeds one. As this situation affects a significant proportion of households in the communities, respondents were asked to only consider situations of "extreme" overcrowding, where this ratio was greatly surpassed. This nuance is key, as it helps account for community-specific contexts and avoids classifying all situations of overcrowding as situations of homelessness. During the interviews, the resource persons were called on to share their knowledge of situations of extreme overcrowding in the community.

4.1.3.1 Profile of at-risk individuals

According to respondents, households with extreme overcrowding generally have multigenerational occupants. Due to the housing shortage on the territories, families are left with no other option but to raise their children in the residence of their own parents, where their brothers and sisters may also live with their own children. As waiting lists for community housing can be particularly long, young families are especially vulnerable to extreme overcrowding:

"The reality is that young families—young mothers, young families, young couples—don't have access to their own housing. They have to live with their parents. If we include that in our definition of overcrowding, I can tell you that we're talking about a lot of young people. People under the age of 25. If you look at it in the context of that particular dynamic." (Resource person, Zone 3)

Similarly, it is not rare for several people from different families to share housing:

"It's frightening. And often enough, what also surprises me, is to see people living together who aren't necessarily related in any way. You try to understand: 'Him, what's he doing there?', you know? Then, let's say, he's friends with the girl or he's friends with one of the children or, you know. Sometimes you really wonder. I'm here trying to figure out the connection, but turns out there are no family ties. It's just people helping each other out." (Resource person, Zone 3)

4.1.3.2 Contributing factors

Extreme overcrowding can generate high levels of tension in the household. According to the resource persons, extreme overcrowding is conducive to the development of conflict, for example, related to sharing food and space as well as paying rent, which can lead to acts of violence. In fact, the living conditions created by overcrowding are fertile ground for abuse, including sexual and physical abuse. These tensions can also be further exacerbated by the consumption of alcohol, which is a trigger for a host of conflicts.

According to the literature, these situations, by promoting overcrowding, are conducive to the "appearance of violence" and fuel addiction (AFNQL and FNQLHSSC, 2008). Finally, this phenomenon can have significant consequences for the youths growing up in these environments:

"The problem is particularly important for the children and the youth. The lack of privacy detracts from the development of children and youth and weakens their chances to succeed in school. How can a youth concentrate on school work without a calm and serene place to study? The answer to this question is obvious." (AFNQL and FNQLHSSC, 2008, p. 13).

Often, the waiting period to access band housing—the principal source of housing in many communities—is several years. The AFNQL estimates that 5,032 units would be required to eliminate current overcrowding (AFNQL, 2014a). What's more, the housing policies in the communities generally prioritize families when allocating band housing, which leaves childless couples and single individuals vulnerable. These measures particularly affect men after a break-up, as children tend to stay with the mother, who in retains possession of the housing (Peters

and Robillard, 2009, p. 663). Other communities establish waiting lists that allocate housing based solely on seniority. Finally, some communities adapt their housing allocation policies according to the different needs in the community.

Aside from housing shortages, overcrowding can also result from resource-sharing strategies. Welfare is the primary source of revenue for many people, and sharing housing-related expenses becomes a sort of survival strategy. Many also claim that this phenomenon can be explained by the strong sense of solidarity in First Nations communities.

Though overcrowding is, to a certain extent, related to the phenomenon of insecure house (people temporarily accommodated by family or friends), it is also associated with off-reserve migration given that affected individuals have very little stability in these situations.

4.1.3.3 Scale of phenomenon

According to the literature, extreme overcrowding is more pervasive in communities in rural zones (Zone 2) and remote zones (Zone 3), where overcrowding affects 24.1% and 26.2% of all householders, respectively (FNQLHSSC, 2013b, p. 31).

Respondents from ten communities reported the presence of extreme overcrowding in their communities. However, most believed it was too difficult to accurately estimate the number of affected households. This probably results from the lack of “housing”-sector resource persons represented in the pool of respondents. Nonetheless, in eight communities, this situation was deemed to be “frequent”:

“We don’t often see two, three, four people to a house. It’s usually five, six, seven, eight, nine people. Every time I see a house with only three occupants, I guarantee you I’ll say, ‘Oh yeah? That’s not a lot of people!’ And then in my head, I automatically think, ‘Hmm... I wonder if I could ask them to take someone in if need be?’” (Resource person, Zone 3)

Based on the analysis of the information gathered during the interviews, it appears that overcrowding particularly affects communities in remote zones (Zone 3). One hypothesis claims it is more difficult for people who live in remote zones to find a place to live outside the community due to the distances that separate them from neighbouring cities. However, this hypothesis could not be validated in the context of the interviews, and further study would be needed.

4.2 Visible homelessness

Visible homelessness consists in situations where people live in public or semi-public spaces or in places not meant for human habitation (e.g. garages, sheds, tents, makeshift shelters, cars) found in the forest or on the community’s inhabited land. Note that this portrait excludes people who choose to live in a cottage or camp in the forest because they want to live a lifestyle inspired by traditional First Nations culture.

4.2.1 Profile of at-risk individuals

Although this form of homelessness affects both genders, a large majority of resource persons deemed that young adult males (between the ages of 18 and 35 years) were overrepresented in this category. The reasons offered to explain this overrepresentation mostly related to the fact that women receive more support than men, which translates into more opportunities for accommodations when they lose their housing. According to the respondents, there were also few elders among this category of homeless. Indeed, the existence of long-term care programs for seniors (primarily offered outside the community) and the fact that they are already part of the health care system make it easier to take charge of this population segment.

4.2.2 Contributing factors

According to respondents, a person’s loss of housing (or opportunities for accommodations) is generally a result of family network fatigue due to mental health problems, accompanied by consumption habits. Individuals grappling with these comorbidities may also have behavioural problems, which, in certain cases, can lead to “irreparable” acts of violence in the family. Oftentimes, these people lose the trust of their network. This type of trajectory is associated with situations of homelessness that may persist over long periods of time (chronic homelessness)²⁴.

²⁴ Chronic homelessness, as described by the MSSS, designates the absence of housing for a long period of time. Although this form of homelessness is the most visible, it is also the least widespread. The people living this form of homelessness are also experiencing marked social disaffiliation. Barring the services that are offered to them, the homeless in this category have few social contacts (MSSS, 2014a).

4.2.3 Scale of phenomenon

Based on the information provided by the resource persons, it appears that situations of visible homelessness do not affect all communities evenly. Although this form of homelessness may only affect a few individuals in most communities, it is considered to be relatively widespread in some urban communities (Zone 1). Although more common in the summer, visible homelessness is considered by the respondents to be a serious problem in the winter due to the lack of emergency shelter services in the communities. Respondents also cited serious health risks for people while intoxicated, such as chilblain and even death.

More specifically, in one community, the respondents qualified the presence of individuals who sleep in makeshift shelters for long periods of time as “frequent.” For some people, their strategy to survive the cold in the winter is to walk all night to avoid chilblain. In another community (Zone 1), the visibly homeless tend to vary greatly from one year to the next.

In five participating communities, people became roofless on a situation-specific, temporary basis (one to a few days) and varied by season. It is interesting to note that, in the two special access communities (Zone 4), there does not appear to be any roofless people, both at the time of the interview and in the past.

The circumstances surrounding this phenomenon in the communities was of little surprise given the lack of services for roofless people in the communities themselves—a community context that is specific to First Nations. In fact, the lack of these kinds of services risks not only fostering the migration of roofless people outside the community, but also giving the false impression that this form of homelessness does not exist on certain territories.

According to respondents, the scale of this phenomenon varies according to season, insofar as people who sleep outside for an unspecified period of time are generally more visible in the summer. In the winter, it is easier for these same people to find temporary accommodations on the territory; alternatively, they tend to migrate to neighbouring cities or urban centres where emergency shelter services and food banks are more accessible. In sum, milder temperatures enable the greater prevalence of this form of homelessness in the summer.

Summer can also be an opportunity for people to “take a break” from family tensions fueled by overcrowding. For example, some individuals may prefer to spend the summer in an abandoned cottage that lacks utilities such as electricity and running water.

ROBERT’S STORY

Robert [fictional name] says he’s been homeless for more than 20 years. His alcoholism, which makes him need to drink on a daily basis, greatly limits his housing opportunities. When he is sober, he can stay with his daughter; however, when he is under the influence of alcohol, he strives to walk the nights away to keep from getting cold. Three years ago, Robert preferred to sleep in a makeshift shelter in the woods, on the community’s territory.

Because his budget is completely geared towards buying alcohol, Robert admits that food is a constant challenge—he has to rely on donations to eat. Whenever he is presented with an opportunity for transportation, Robert goes to Quebec City or Montreal to take advantage of the emergency shelter and food services. However, he always returns to his community in order to be with “his people.” Each winter, to escape the extreme cold, Robert reports intentionally committing acts of theft to be taken into custody, where he won’t have to worry about meeting his daily needs, such as staying warm and being fed.

When questioned about his childhood, Robert recalls a particularly difficult period during which he was the victim of physical violence. His father, a “chronic alcoholic” who perpetrated this abuse, was sent to a residential school when he was young. When Robert was about 20 years old, a break-up left him homeless. Since he didn’t have a family network to rely on, he ended up on the streets for the first time.

When asked what he would change in his life if he had a “magic wand,” Robert answered that he wouldn’t change a thing. Robert feels that he “doesn’t owe anything to anyone,” which is important to him.

“It’s more difficult to manage in the winter. We become more aware of the problems, as people are more likely to seek help. Often, in the summer, they will manage to get by. [...] In the winter, they’ll try to tolerate the situation a little more, then during the summer, it’s easier for them to take a break, to say, ‘Hey, I’m going to spend three weeks at the cottage’ or ‘I’m going to borrow my friend’s cottage...’, especially if the person is unemployed. So the person can leave the confines of the village. It can be a way to take a break from the overcrowding.” (Resource person, Zone 3)

Finally, although this type of homelessness does not appear to be widespread in most communities, caution is still needed when interpreting the scale of the phenomenon, notably due to the limited services offered to these people. This specific clientele is absent from the continuum of services specifically because of the dearth of appropriate services, which furthermore encourages their exodus towards cities where they can find services that are adapted to their needs.

The textbox below presents the trajectory of a visibly homeless person who was interviewed for this portrait.

4.3 Houseless

Unlike people in situations of hidden or visible homelessness, some people become houseless because of particular circumstances or a specific event in their lives. During the interviews, the following situations were addressed: people due to be released from penal institutions, treatment or rehabilitation centres and hospitals, as well as young people leaving the youth protection system, and who do not have any housing lined up on their 18th birthday. The situations of people living in shelters for victims of domestic violence were also discussed during the interviews, specifically with respect to the health and safety risks they faced when they returned home. However, because insufficient information was collected about these situations during the interviews, the resulting portraits are less comprehensive.

4.3.1 People due to be released from institutions

According to the information collected during the interviews, this problem particularly affects men of all ages. The three main reasons cited to explain the difficulties encountered by these individuals following a release from jail primarily relate to social exclusion, family fatigue and the distance separating the correction centre from the person’s home community.

Though infrequent, the cases of social exclusion addressed during the interviews were related to acts of sexual violence or “irreparable violence” that led to a jail sentence. Upon their release, the individuals found guilty of this type of crime often come home to a fractured social network due to the danger they were now perceived to represent to the community.

The release from a correctional centre can in and of itself lead to a situation of homelessness for a person whose home community is located in a remote zone. In such cases, people are left with few options and end up experiencing an episode of homelessness in the First Nations community located near the institution. They may also end up staying in these communities for long periods of time while waiting for an opportunity to go back to their own community:

“People come here because of the hospital, all the health services, the legal system. The detention centre. That’s what brings them here. They end up doing their time, then... They somehow find their way to [name of community], but can’t get all the way to [name of community in a remote zone].” (Resource person, Zone 1)

Of course, jail time may also be part of the seasonal survival strategy for some visibly homeless (i.e. roofless) people. Without a place to sleep, some people will intentionally commit a minor crime to gain access to a bed, food and, more importantly, a place where they will not be cold:

- “In parallel, we’ve also met people who intentionally get thrown in jail in the winter.
- Yes.
- Of course, they get to eat!
- That’s important!
- ...like taking a vacation, some might say.
- [...]
- It’s one way to stay warm and...
- ...to be fed, be warm...” (Resource persons, Zone 1)

Similarly, some people may find themselves without a place to sleep after staying in the hospital for physical or mental health problems. As discharge may be conditional on someone assuming responsibility for the person, or because of past acts of violence, some families may refuse put up a member of the family. Alternatively, some may accept to accommodate a family member, even though they lack sufficient resources. In light of the overpopulation and overcrowding conditions

that are pervasive in some community, these situations are liable to create significant family tensions inside households.

Most respondents qualified these situations as “rare” in the community, as the affected persons are generally able to find accommodations within their own social networks. However, these accommodation opportunities do not constitute stable housing, and therefore fall under the umbrella of hidden homelessness:

“[...] of course, the person is more at risk whenever he has to stay outside the community, whatever the reason may be, but the person generally finds accommodations. Even if the person has to change places, he generally won't have any trouble finding someone willing to help him out. But for me, someone who needs to be 'helped' is still a person at risk, even if he's not technically 'roofless'.” (Resource person, Zone 2)

The lack of intermediate shelter resources in the community is a big problem for several resource persons, especially for social and addiction workers. Since there are no available accommodations on the territory, people who are released or discharged are often left with no other option but to return to their prior living environment, where they are often surrounded by drinking and drug use. Even though these people have a real desire to change, these living conditions can lead to relapse.

“Because coming to the community, there's no, really, place for them, and they'll only end up at the same place where they were. [...] they are back into the same conditions that they were in. There is no problem for those people if they come in, because, you know, they have money, and they can buy some alcohol, they're welcome at the door.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

4.3.2 People living in shelters for victims of domestic violence

Domestic (conjugal, family) violence was addressed during the interview, specifically in terms of the physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse that could be inflicted on women, children, men and seniors. All these forms of violence were identified during the interviews to avoid excluding any given form of violence that could lead to homelessness for the victims.

Out of all the participating communities (13), five had a shelter for victims of domestic or conjugal violence directly on their territory or nearby, and offered services adapted to First Nations. When living in communities that have not developed this kind of service offer, victims of domestic violence tend to turn to services offered in cities that are sometimes more than four hours away by car, just to obtain support that is culturally appropriate for First Nations.

4.3.2.1 Profile of at-risk individuals

Although not all victims of domestic violence are homeless, young women with children and seniors are considered to be at greater risk (young women, due to conjugal violence; and seniors, due to economic abuse). Resource persons have sometimes witnessed elder abuse. Women tend to hide situations of conjugal violence from others, and similarly, seniors only rarely report situations of abuse because, despite everything, they generally want to stay with their family.

4.3.2.2 Scale of phenomenon

Far from denying the presence of this phenomenon in their respective communities, several respondents nonetheless deemed that it was difficult to estimate the scale of this phenomenon due to the low reporting rate. In some communities, it is taboo to talk about situations of conjugal violence, which leads victims to suffer in silence or to rely on themselves to improve their situation. Women who leave their abusive partners with their children in tow often call on their family network to find accommodations, which, according to respondents, contributes to the problem of overcrowding.

4.3.3 Homeless First Nations youths with a history of foster care

4.3.3.1 Contributing factors

According to respondents, it appears that some young people who have been placed in foster care face obstacles when approaching the age of majority, but for different reasons. First, youths who are placed in care as children are already at a risk of homelessness, not so much because of the placement in itself, but rather because of the reasons that led to the placement, such as abuse and neglect. As such, the adjustment and developmental disorders that are strongly associated to their experiences of trauma during childhood are what place these young people at risk of homelessness once they reach adulthood:

“Me, I’d say yes [that they are overrepresented among the homeless]. Not so much because they were placed or because they were subject to youth protection measures, but because of the reasons they were placed under the protection of the *Youth Protection Act* to begin with [...], for instance trauma, developmental issues, adjustment disorders problems, neglect, which can cause them to experience periods of insecurity, distress, which makes them vulnerable when they reach adulthood.” (Resource person, Zone 2)

Second, those who were placed outside of their communities face additional obstacles. Although most communities are capable of placing these youths on their own territory, there are simply not enough foster families to take them all in. As such, some children are placed outside of the community (in a non-Aboriginal environment) or in a community other than their community of origin.

According to the literature, when they approach adulthood, these youths often want to go back to live in their community of origin (Goyette and Grenier, 2009). However, though these youths often struggle to identify with their adoptive environment, they also face obstacles to reintegrate and “reconnect” with their community of origin (Goyette and Grenier, 2009).

The interviews were able to corroborate the literature. First Nations youths with a history of foster care not only face sizeable obstacles with respect to their sense of identity, they must also confront, once they reach adulthood, obstacles in terms of accessing social services in their adoptive community. Indeed, the accessibility of services offered by the community hinges on the existence of agreements between the adoptive community and the community of origin.

“[...] for the kids who have been placed in [name of community], and have lived here for the majority of their life, it’s like, where do they belong after, and where do they go? Because they weren’t brought up in their own community, and it’s not the safest place for them to be. Or this is not their community either, like, they can’t really access the services here once they turn 18. [...] I think they’re torn. I think they’ve been well taken care of by their families, but they’re still torn by the other family that’s waiting for them, maybe, to go home when they’re 18. [...]” (Resource person, Zone 1)

4.3.3.2 Scale of phenomenon

The overrepresentation of First Nations youths with a history of foster care among the homeless was underscored in a community where most of the young people known to the resource persons interviewed had been placed in a rehabilitation centre outside of their territory. These resource persons bemoaned how these youths often came to distrust social services (as well as all types of professionals that represented some sort of authority). This dynamic can make young people reticent to approach frontline services, which, of note, is designed for voluntary clientele. According to respondents, it is very difficult to develop a helping relationship with these individuals:

“[...] those that come out of youth protection have developed this sort of hostility towards social services... And they are difficult. It’s very difficult to bring someone to voluntarily seek out those services, when these services have been imposed on them their entire life. They are just like people who come out of institutions, essentially. There’s hostility toward social workers... (Resource person, Zone 1)

“For one, they are wary of these services. When I asked someone who had been in youth protection about it, he told me, ‘You guys were just such a big part of my life that I don’t want to see you anymore.’ So those who age out of youth protection will do everything they can to avoid seeing me, even if it’s to ask for help to find a place to live. They’ll often try to find their own accommodations by staying with friends or family. Young people are very suspicious of us.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

On the other hand, one respondent felt that once these youths had reached adulthood, they generally had more opportunities to “find their place.” In other words, young people who have been in youth protection can count on opportunities for accommodations among their foster family, as well as support from their biological family. However, there are a number of risks inherent with returning to their biological families, especially when drinking problems, drug use and violence are part of the family environment.

Solidarity

5. MIGRATION AND CIRCULAR MOBILITY

According to the literature review, Aboriginal people in Canada are very mobile (AANDC, 2013)—in fact much more mobile than the general Canadian population (CMHC, 1996; Norris and Clatworthy, 2003). In addition to being a symptom of the difficult living conditions affecting First Nations, this phenomenon also places them at a greater risk of homelessness.

Norris and Clatworthy (2003) define the term “migrant” based on the Canadian census definition, that is, “those who have moved between communities” and “mobility” as “all moves involving a change of residence,” whether outbound from or inbound to the community (p. 53). In sum, the concept of migration consists in individuals moving from one location to another, in a range of combinations: city to city, community to city, city to community, and finally, community to community.

Due to the growing Aboriginal population in several Canadian cities, there is a popular belief that claims that the reserves are emptying to the benefit of the cities. However, this is a myth: From 1996 to 2006, the number of “in-migrants” in the communities has in fact exceeded the number of “out-migrants.” (AANDC, 2013)

For the purposes of this portrait, only migration flows to or from communities were examined.

It appears that First Nations in Quebec are not exempt from this phenomenon of migration. Nearly half of First Nations aged 18 years or older—that is, 45.5%—report having already lived outside of their community (FNQLHSSC, 2013c). Among these migrants, 13.2% have already left their community to move to another. A survey of a sample of 1,000 Aboriginal people living in urban areas revealed that 29% of people had lived in both a city and a First Nations community before the age of 18 (Labrana et al., 2014, p. 15).

5.1 Reasons for migration among first nations

First Nations communities generally have few employment opportunities due to low levels of economic activity in the communities (Lepage, 2009). As mentioned by the Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ, 2008), faced with the poor social and economic conditions in the communities, many First Nations decide to leave to improve their own situation (p. 9). For many First Nations who want to improve their living conditions, it even becomes necessary to migrate to the city (Patrick, 2015). Among First Nations aged 18 years or older who have at one point migrated outside of their community, the main reasons cited were education (35.4%), employment (24.6%), relationship (14.6%) and housing (11.1%) (FNQLHSSC, 2013c).²⁵ Among the Canadian population of Registered Indians, women have higher rates of “out-migration” from reserves than men, who, for different reasons, have higher rates of “in-migration” (i.e. migrating to other “reserves” (Norris and Clatworthy, 2003, p. 58). According to the same authors, this trend suggests that there may be different “push and pull factors” that affect men and women differently.

According to the information gathered during the interviews, though people may consider migrating outside of the community as a solution to a problem on the territory, it can nonetheless be a positive experience:

²⁵ Note that this data was drawn from a sample of First Nations individuals who were living in a community at the time of the survey.

“They either go to [the temporary shelter located about 40 km away], or they go stay with family for a few weeks. Then they come back, stay a few months, then head back out. Yes. I’d say it’s frequent. [...] That said, I’d like to mention that for a lot of people, leaving the community to go elsewhere gives them a breather. [...] I think their takeaway is positive. It gives them hope, some room to breathe. It gives them an opportunity to consider that things could get better.” (Resource person, Zone 3)

According to the literature, First Nations who transition from the community to the city can experience a host of difficulties, including social isolation (Norris and Clatworthy, 2003) and culture and social shock (Wente, 2000, in Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005; FNQLHSSC, 2013c), which could in some cases be associated with language barriers (i.e. difficulty speaking English or French). Discrimination is identified as yet another obstacle to adequate housing and employment. Due to prejudice or lack of credit history, some landlords refuse to lease to First Nations. As a result, several families end up in inadequate, overcrowded housing conditions. This is particularly the case for women and their children, who are therefore particularly vulnerable to hidden homelessness.

According to two resource persons, migrating to big city centres also presents certain risk factors for First Nations. Despite the many opportunities for emancipation, cities can lead to significant culture shock, particularly due to the prominence of individualism. In Montreal, this represents a significant risk for Aboriginal women, who are quickly targeted by prostitution rings. When they arrive at the Montreal bus terminal, they are offered various accommodations, and they do not necessarily suspect that anything is behind these “opportunities.” These prostitution rings work so quickly that women never even step foot in the resource centres that offer accommodations, referrals, support and accompaniment services to facilitate their integration. In order to prevent these situations, the community’s personnel may notify the Montreal police force (Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, or SPVM) of the impending arrival of an at-risk individual. The SPVM can then accompany these women to the appropriate resource centres (Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal, Projets Autochtones du Québec, Women’s Centre of Montreal) immediately upon their arrival.

According to the First Nations Regional Health Survey, the main reasons reported for returning to the community were family (63.8%), ties with their community of origin (36.5%), possibilities of employment (29.5%) and availability of housing (17.4%) (FNQLHSSC, 2013c). Respondents also claimed during the interviews that people often returned home

after running into problems outside of the community. The presence of family and opportunities in the community are then seen as a solution to this moment of adversity:

“Then, people will come back, try to get a bit of work to qualify for EI [Employment Insurance]. I often hear that. They will go off to school, decide to come back home for a year, get some work, get their EI, then go back. People come back for financial reasons. When they can no longer pay their rent, they come back. They’ll either go back to where they were living, or go home to their family. It’s mainly for financial reasons.” (Resource person, Zone 3)

In some places, it can be very difficult to have access to housing after a prolonged absence from the territory. Some communities require people to have been a resident for a few years before being eligible for housing. This kind of criteria not only constitutes an obstacle to housing, but also presents a paradox, insofar as it can be difficult to reside on a territory without access to housing.

In sum, and for many reasons, the migration of First Nations outside of their community can place them at risk of some form of homelessness once they arrive in the city. The combination of culture shock upon arrival in the city (especially urban centres) and the fact of being at an economic and educational disadvantage can constitute a very tall barrier for the integration of First Nations migrants.

5.2 Homeless mobility

Although the phenomenon of migration affects First Nation as a whole, it is a particularly key issue among individuals in a situation of homelessness. In fact, some research studies have indicated the prevalence of “urban-rural” migration flows among homeless First Nations (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005). Having studied the community’s place in the mobility strategy of First Nations homeless people in Prince Albert (Saskatchewan), Peters and Robillard (2009) found that the community was either the origin or destination in about one-third of migrations (p. 662). These findings corroborate the comments made by resource persons during the interviews, insofar as they claimed it was difficult to know the mobility paths of the homeless, as they could be very mobile.

5.2.1 Reasons for leaving and returning to the community

According to the same authors, most First Nations homeless migrate outside the community due to the breakdown of social networks within the family, the “unattractive” community environment, or institutionalization. These reasons are strongly anchored in a colonial legacy that transformed communities into places of poverty and isolation (p. 664). In general, young people often cite community conditions as the reason for leaving.

Whereas women are more inclined to return to their community to escape a family conflict in the city or another community or to visit their family, men are more likely to return after being released from jail or to find housing (Peters and Robillard, 2009). Young people, on the other hand, tend to return to the community to visit an adult or to escape a family conflict in the city. Despite the poor housing conditions, people always find a place to stay with family (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005, p. 665). As such, for many, the community represents an important “pull” factor (Norris and Clatworthy, 2003, p. 66). Barring employment and education, the reasons for returning to the community are similar to the reasons for leaving the community in the first place (Peters and Robillard, 2009). However, returning migrants are not always welcomed with arms wide open, especially if they return after developing health problems, such as HIV/AIDS and addiction problems (Noël, 2002, in Girard, LeBlanc et al., 2007).

The information collected from respondents corroborated many of the research findings in the literature, as well as raised new ones. According to respondents from six participating communities, several people moved to big urban centres or smaller cities—which are sometimes very far away—to have access to emergency shelters, food banks and clothes:

“[In the city], there are more services to eat, take a shower, wash. I haven’t washed in three weeks...” (Visibly homeless individual, Zone 1)

Some people are also drawn to Quebec City and Montreal for the possibility of anonymity. These people do not particularly enjoy community life, notably due to the lack of confidentiality or the presence of a drug and/or drinking network:

“Of course, there are all sorts of reasons. It varies from person to person. For example, some people feel everyone knows everyone else’s business, what with the rumour mill and all that. Others say, ‘I wasn’t made to live in the country, so I’m moving to the city.’” (Resource person, Zone 1)

“People will leave because they don’t feel comfortable with their lifestyle in the community in terms of drinking and substance abuse, for example. They will leave, and settle down in the city. Over there, if they experience any difficulties, they have access to a lot more resources.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

Others still may leave the community for health reasons:

“Some people leave for the city because they need specialized treatment over the medium to long term. There are also people who simply can’t come back to the community because they won’t have access to these resources—dialysis, for example. There are many kinds of dialysis. Some you can do from here, but others, you can’t. So some people often have to stay in the Quebec City region to get these treatments. For them, leaving the community isn’t a matter of choice.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

Finally, the appeal of nearby cities can also lie in more accessible housing, and affordable housing in particular. Some people choose to leave rather than deal with family tensions fueled by overcrowding. For these people, leaving not ideal. In addition, they must also contend with difficulties associated with high levels of prejudice against First Nations in the city, which has the effect of limiting their access to housing and accentuating their vulnerability to homelessness. The presence of an extended family and social network outside the territory is another reason cited for leaving the community.

The community represents a pull factor for many First Nations. Although some people come back after experiencing failure outside the community (homelessness, personal finances, break-ups, etc.), the homecomings are also motivated by a sense of attachment that ties individuals to the community. As mentioned by one visibly homeless individual:

"I wanted to see the people here. I wanted to see my people. I wanted to be with my friends." (Visibly homeless individual, Zone 1)

In sum, similarly to First Nations in general, homeless First Nations often leave the reserve to improve their situation, but return to maintain their social ties and meet their cultural needs (RCAAQ, 2008; FNQLHSSC, 2013c). In-migrations and out-migrations are therefore "primarily based on balancing needs for resources, relationships, safety, and emotional well-being" (Patrick, 2015, p. 26).

5.2.2 Circular mobility

To underscore the significance of the moving patterns of homeless people, some authors refer to "hypermobility," a phenomenon observed among Aboriginal homeless in the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Lévesque, Cloutier et al., 2013). In some prairie cities, Distasio et al. (2005) found that 20% of homeless First Nations made "seasonal" visits to their community.

This hypermobility among homeless First Nations is connected to the idea of "circular mobility" (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005), which consists in rural-urban movement patterns that leave individuals increasingly vulnerable from one cycle to the next (Perreault, Turcotte et al., 2010, p. 9). According to the authors, these movements are part of a "complex" dynamic and are influenced by difficulties, unexpected events and the connection with culture and family:

"After living in a city for so long, without a network, without any money, without work, people return to their community for a short while, often because they have nowhere else to go, before going back to the city. When they come back to their community, these people are not only confronted with the very situation they left behind, but moreover face additional challenges." [translation] (Lévesque, Cloutier et al., 2013)

Some resource persons confirmed this idea, namely, that frequent moves to and from the community were motivated by adversity and did not contribute to improving the situations of the affected persons:

"[These frequent moves to and from the community can] make these people more vulnerable, I think. Because when [this person] goes to [name of neighbouring community], she will experience the same situation she is trying to escape here. And we won't necessarily be able to share information with the resources there, because we won't know where she went. And it's all tied in with alcohol and drug addiction problems. Plus drinking problems in this case. So what do we do? We raise the question, we ask her to become actively involved, and suddenly, woops! She's off to another community." (Resource person, Zone 1)

When people leave the community for a more or less extended period of time, it breaks the continuum of services that is offered to them. Some resource persons stressed that this lifestyle particularly affected those with addiction and mental health issues. This situation is particularly problematic because it weakens the social and community network:

"When a person keeps leaving and returning to his environment, the situation is generally bad. I'm talking about trauma. The person experienced trauma. He is depressed, has been through depression... That's where we'll find, for example, mental health problems that are not generally genetic, but arise as a result of trauma. These people, in the community, it's not well seen when they leave to go to another community." (Resource person, Zone 2)

"[This one person] regularly relies on our services. [She] will exhaust her family resources, then move on to public services: she turns to us, police officers, nurses, [she] will mobilize the whole system. At the same time, this person has a pattern. [...] Once [she] has exhausted all of these resources, [she] will come back to the community. [...] For [her], it's a good thing, because [she] gets peace, quote-unquote. No one is going to bother her about her medication, because we try to regulate her medication somewhat, and [she] doesn't like that [...]." (Resource person, Zone 1)

Essentially, the interviews revealed that the movements of individuals known to have adopted this lifestyle are generally motivated by difficulties encountered as well as the availability of services both inside and outside the community. In fact, this phenomenon appears to be more prevalent in less remote communities (communities from Zone 1 and Zone 2). In the same vein, the respondents from participating communities in more remote zones (Zones 3 and Zone 4) generally reported not being aware of this practice, which is not surprising given that movements to or from communities in remote zones are more complicated and can be quite expensive.

Finally, respondents noted that circular mobility compromises the support network for people in the community. These observations in part corroborated the literature, which finds that this phenomenon creates a significant obstacle outside of these territories in terms of establishing viable services to urban Aboriginal populations (Distasio, Sylvestre et al., 2005).

According to Lévesque et al. (2013), homelessness is often wrongly associated with the idea of freedom or even nomadic lifestyles. Several people in fact explain their situation as freedom of choice. However, most of the time, this “choice” is made between two options that are far from being ideal for these individuals. Although the traditional way of life of some First Nations in Quebec indeed rests on seasonal nomadism, it would be imprudent to consider Aboriginal homelessness as a simple extension of this way of life, as the two realities are starkly different (Lévesque, Cloutier et al., 2013).

5.2.3 Presence of homeless people from other communities

Respondents from six participating communities confirmed the presence of First Nations homeless from other communities among their homeless population. Although First Nations homeless from outside the community do not constitute the majority of homeless, they are nonetheless present, especially in urban communities (Zone 1).

The reasons cited to explain the presence of First Nations homeless from other communities hinged on the proximity to a city with several services, especially health care and legal services. Some communities are considered attractive simply because they are less isolated and closer to services.

“The only thing special about this community is that we’re close to the city. That’s it. The people from [name of remote community] who come here, who experience some form of homelessness or rely on couchsurfing, they come here because of the city. The people from here don’t necessarily migrate to [name of remote community] to be homeless.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

In two communities, the presence of these individuals is explained by the accessibility of alcohol. As a result of band council resolutions, the sale and public consumption of alcohol and alcohol products is banned in some communities. Individuals will migrate to communities that have not regulated the matter in search of alcohol, and end up in a situation of homelessness for an undetermined period of time.

Trauma



6. OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OF FIRST NATIONS HOMELESSNESS

Based on the interviews and literature, it is clear that individual factors alone cannot explain why people experience an episode of homelessness. In fact, individual factors such as mental health and addiction problems interact with structural factors with political, historical, economic and cultural dimensions. These individuals, influenced by their own intentions, their social networks and opportunities available in their own communities, evolve inside different environments that interact with one another.

Having studied the effects of intergenerational trauma on homeless Aboriginal men, Menzies (2009, p. 16) stresses that the public policies put in place to govern Aboriginal people have disrupted relations between the four traditional social systems of Aboriginal culture,

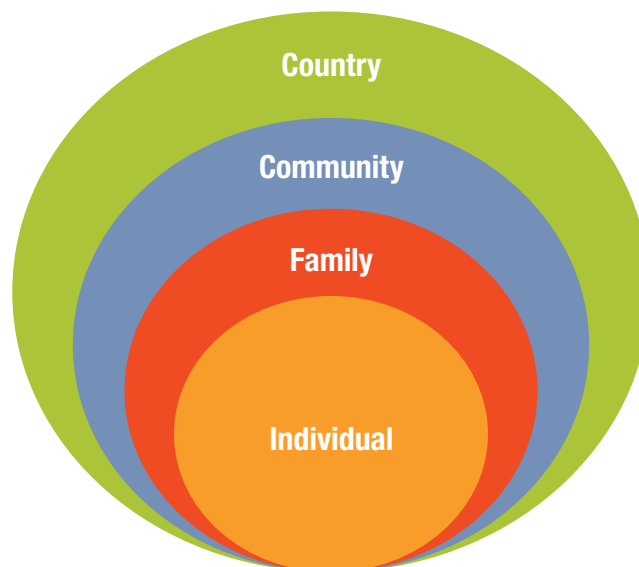
namely, the individual, the family, the community and the nation. By fostering an imbalance between these four systems, the policies “incubated negative social conditions for Aboriginal people, making them significantly more vulnerable to a number of threatening conditions, including homelessness.”

Due to their relevance within Aboriginal cultures, these four systems provide a useful model for analyzing the causation factors of homelessness in the communities. Figure 1 (below) presents a diagram inspired by Menzies (2009) and the MSSS’ reference framework for analyzing the contributing factors of homelessness (MSSS, 2008). For synthesizing purposes, the contributing factors are identified based on the origin of the finding (i.e. data collection and/or the literature review).

Culture

Communities

FIGURE 1: SYNTHESIS OF FACTORS EXPLAINING HOMELESSNESS IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES



Individual

- Loss of a family member (“the pillar of the family”)
- Low level of education
- Problems with alcoholism and/or substance abuse
- Mental health problems
- Incarceration
- High mobility
- Significant childhood trauma
- Breakdown of social ties
- Foster care or placement
- ▲ Low self-esteem
- ▲ No sense of belonging to a group

Family

- Family culture that fosters residential instability
- Family fatigue
- History of family violence
- Experience of domestic violence
- ▲ Open and repeated display of drinking and drug use in the family environment

Community

- Housing policies that are poorly adapted to the community’s needs
- Chronic housing shortage and overcrowding
- Social exclusion
- ▲ Lateral violence
- ▲ Lack of cultural opportunities (transmission of language, history, values and spirituality)
- ▲ Open display of drinking and drug use in the community

Country (social and political environment)

- National policies that undermine development (*Indian Act*)
- Negative social representations of First Nations (discrimination and racism)
- Chronic poverty

Legend

- Contributing factors identified during data collection
- Contributing factors identified in the literature and validated by the data collection
- ▲ Contributing factors identified in the literature, but not entirely validated during the interviews

7. DISCUSSION

This portrait makes certain distinctions with respect to gender and records the inadequacy of community services designed to support or accompany people experiencing a form of homelessness. However, it is also important to note the portrait's limitations with respect to gauging the extent of the phenomenon of homelessness in the communities.

7.1 Men

Based on the interviews, it appears that a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness in the communities are men, particularly due to situations of insecure housing (hidden homelessness) and visible homelessness. Men are also more likely to become homeless after being released from institutions (e.g. rehabilitation or treatment centre). This overrepresentation can be explained by a variety of factors that hinder autonomy which can come to the forefront especially, for example, when they experience a crisis situation or undergo a life-changing event. The housing policies in the communities—where these do in fact exist—very rarely allow for the allocation of band housing to people without dependent children (often men). As mentioned in section 4.1.1 on insecure housing (couchsurfing), women often remain housed following a break-up as they generally assume the responsibilities associated with raising the children. As such, the chronic housing shortages that plague communities combined with local policies that prioritize families for housing greatly reduce housing options for men and consequently their capacity for autonomy in difficult times.

Men are also known to experience homelessness in isolation. Men are also overrepresented in forms of homelessness associated with drinking and drug use or addiction:

“[...] we see it more often with men because of their drinking problems. Often, men will get kicked out because of their drinking and mental health problems, and we don't see this as much with women. Instead, we'll often see women with children who are looking for a place to stay because they can't find adequate housing to raise children in. They end up having to move in with their parents, with an uncle, an aunt, you know?” (Resource person, Zone 3)

When drinking patterns are accompanied by mental health problems, it becomes particularly difficult to help people find stable housing, especially in a context where transitional shelter services for men are almost inexistent in the communities.

7.2 Women

According to the resource persons, women use a different set of strategies to stay off the streets. Aware of the risk of sexual predation that is often inherent in situations of insecure housing (couchsurfing), women instead turn to family for accommodations. In addition, women are often accompanied by their children, which bolster the effects of family solidarity. As a result, women (and their children) are more likely than men to live in severely overcrowded conditions, which, as noted above, generate family tensions and create the breeding grounds for abuse.

Women are also more vulnerable to situations of domestic violence, which negatively impacts their health and safety (and that of their children). When women experience a crisis situation, they tend to steer away from services out of fear that their children will be taken away, even though the support and accommodation services are adapted to their situation (and sometimes even available inside the community) and accessible to them in their time of need.

“Often, women who are victims of domestic violence won't come and see us, for one, because they are afraid youth protection will show up and take her children—that's often what mothers fear most. [...] They're afraid their children will get placed, because they themselves got placed when they were children, or were monitored by youth protection at some point in their lives. So in [name of community], we still have a bit of trouble with frontline services.” (Resource person, Zone 1)

As mentioned in section 4.3.2 on people living in shelters for victims of domestic violence, not all communities have resources to accommodate and support victims of domestic violence (five out of the 13 participating communities offered this type of resource at the time of data collection). As a result, the only resources adapted to women in these situations are often located hundreds of kilometres away from home. Because they carry the double burden of violence and migration, houseless women become particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

7.3 First nations youths

According to the literature, in 2001, Aboriginal youths made up close to 20% of the street youths in Ottawa, yet only 2% of the city's population (CMHC, 2001). Reasons explaining this overrepresentation can be found in the sometimes difficult family environment in which these young people are raised. Due to the disadvantageous socioeconomic context that disproportionately affects First Nations, youths are more likely to come from families with problems associated with violence, alcohol or drug abuse or inadequate housing (Patrick, 2015). As such, even if they were never placed outside their homes during childhood, First Nations youths may also be highly subjected to the disadvantages of the marginalization of Aboriginal people.

This data is concerning as street youths adopt "lifestyles" that are particularly hazardous for their health. Many street youths engage in illicit activities, such as prostitution, theft and drug dealing. HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted diseases as well as suicide are of particular concern for frontline community services (CMHC, 2001). In addition, the mortality rate among males of this population is 9 times greater than that of the general youth population of Quebec, and 31 times greater among women (CMHC, 2001, p. 2).

The resource persons stressed that employability programs were not aligned with the realities of youths in difficulty. Too often, the eligibility criteria for employment assistance programs are designed for youths who have completed Secondary III or V, and several First Nations youths do not qualify on this basis. Because these youths do not have access to programs that would allow them to develop competencies to access a trade that would give them financial independence, they are considered to be at risk of homelessness. The resource persons also lamented the ad hoc nature of programs, which do not promote job maintenance among youths:

"Then, what also happens [...] is that you end up relying on employment measures to develop the labour force. You know, some people will be able to find jobs, and the employer will keep them on because of this funding measure, but as soon as the measure is done, unfortunately, they show people the door. Ciao, bye! And band councils are the first ones to do this." (Resource person, Zone 1)

7.4 Service offer

The observations made during the interviews highlighted the poor service offer available to people at risk of homelessness or in a situation of homelessness in the communities. Due to the lack of emergency or transition shelters, services primarily consist in referrals to shelters located outside the territory. The accommodation and support services designed for people in situations of homelessness located outside the territories are not always accessible to First Nations, nor adapted to their needs. What's more, when these shelters are located at a relative distance from the community, there are no programs to cover transportation costs, creating a problem of accessibility for people who require emergency shelter.

Among the 13 participating communities, only a single resource providing emergency shelter specifically for homeless people was identified. The resource in question is a private home where an informal caregiver accepts to take these people in for a period of time ranging from one to a few days. Though these efforts are commendable, this type of resource is limited to emergency shelter, and does not put these people in contact with support services to better equip them to improve their housing situation in the long term.

For several resource persons and social and addiction workers in particular, the absence of intermediate shelter resources in the community is a major shortcoming in the continuum of services offered. Faced with few housing options on the territories, the individuals released from prison or completing their stay at an addiction treatment centre often have no other choice but to return to their former environment. These are in turn often characterized by the presence of drinking and drug use, which can lead to a relapse despite a genuine desire to change lifestyles.

As support services are limited to referrals, resource persons are not equipped to offer robust assistance to people experiencing homelessness in the community. This framework not only compels the most vulnerable people to migrate outside the community for resources, but moreover does little to promote competency development among the professionals who are in a position to offer more adapted support.

7.5 Difficulties associated with estimating the scale of the problem of homelessness in the communities

Respondents were generally not comfortable with the idea of estimating the number of individuals affected by the above issues. This held true for all the forms of homelessness addressed during the interviews. This discomfort stems, in part, from the fact that the cases of homelessness known to resource persons are liable to vary over the years according to season, living conditions, housing conditions that are often characterized by various forms of vulnerability, as well as the meaning ascribed to the concept of home by First Nations. In addition, the resource persons may not be aware of many situations due to the limited scope of their roles and the fact that these individuals do not solicit the range of services offered in the community. As such, though the portrait painted by the interviews gave a general idea of the extent of the issues, it must not be used to make generalizations. Results must be interpreted with care.

Further research using different methodological strategies is needed to address this shortcoming. It is also important to note that the I-CLSC information system, which keeps a record of health and social services interventions, is currently being implanted in First Nations communities. This system serves to record the different clinical interventions that are carried out, for instance in connection with homelessness and housing, in addition to the underlying reasons (types of problems) requiring the interventions. To date, since the interventions associated with homelessness have not been uniformly compiled in I-CLSC, the data cannot be used for the purposes of this portrait. However, it nonetheless represents a potential source of information that could become very useful for documenting the phenomenon of homelessness in the communities in the years to come.

The big population growth experienced by First Nations has resulted in a particularly young population. In 2008, more than one-third of adults were under the age of 35. The median age of First Nations was 28 years old in 2008, as opposed to 41 years old for the general Quebec population in 2006 (FNQLHSSC, 2013a).

CONCLUSION

The literature review and data collection survey among resource persons and homeless individuals in 13 First Nations communities in Quebec made it possible to shed light on the phenomenon of homelessness and how it materializes on these territories. In sum, this portrait lifted the veil from a poorly documented phenomenon and contributed to a stronger collective awareness of the existence of this phenomenon in the communities. Indeed, a better understanding of this reality and of the people who live these types of situations is necessary to establish a community service offer that is adapted to their experiences.

However, the selection of resource persons as principal respondents for this study presents certain limitations. The underlying strategy allows for the creation of a highly nuanced portrait of a situation; however, these actors are necessarily biased by their own professional practice, which is in turn determined in large part by the community's service offer. In other words, the perspectives offered by the resource persons stemmed from their subjective interpretation of the phenomenon of homelessness, which prohibits any generalizations on the basis of the information collected.

This research methodology provided a relatively broad outlook on the phenomenon. Adopting different research strategies in a context of further study would serve to study the phenomenon in greater depth. For example, a life course study of homeless people in a community context would allow for an analysis of the choices, events and constraints that influenced people during their lives. This type of study would shed greater light not only on the complexity inherent to these trajectories, but moreover on the diversity of conditions that explain how a person can become or remain homeless.

Although this portrait did not originally intend to delve into the issue of services, the analysis of the respondents' observations unveiled a significant shortcoming in this respect on the communities' territories. In light of this finding, it is recommended that a study be conducted on the needs in addition to the resources that are available to develop the necessary service offer in the communities. A better understanding of community and government dimensions could promote a better inclusion of homeless people in the continuum of services offered in the communities.

Finally, greater awareness must be cultivated surrounded the fact that, as is the case with homelessness in general, homelessness among First Nations incurs significant financial costs for society. Indeed, economic analyses show a much greater utilization rate of health services, police services and the justice system among the homeless as opposed to the suitably housed. In addition, studies have shown this relationship to be bidirectional, insofar as a person's health problems or judicialization could lead them into homelessness, and that homelessness creates major needs for these services.

Other than its financial impact, homelessness also produces a high social cost for the individuals, families and communities who, whether directly or indirectly, experience this sad phenomenon. Individuals living a situation of homelessness are at greater risk of health problems and judicialization, which undermines their ability to thrive as people who can effect change in their life and play a role in their community's development. This portrait also reveals that one person's experience of homelessness and residential instability can have an impact on subsequent generations. As emphasized during the interviews, homelessness is accompanied by a certain set of life skills and knowledge that children tend to perpetuate as adults.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RESOURCE PERSONS

Introduction to the interview:

- Explain to the respondent his or her rights with respect to his or her participation (confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw consent without prejudice, no obligation to answer every question, etc.) on the consent form.
- Inform the respondent of the approximate duration of the interview (about 90 minutes).
- After the respondent consents (signature), begin the interview with a synthesized overview of the **project context** (funding source, the new ground being broken by the portrait), the **objectives** (4) and the **forms of homelessness** and housing-related exclusion (see appendix a). Finally, inform the respondent that his or her participation in the project will contribute to a better understanding of the issues relating to homelessness in the communities, which is key to raising awareness of the different actors involved and reducing prejudice on the issue.
- **Record the interview:** Ask for the respondent's permission.

Profile of the respondent

1. Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Community name: _____
3. Are you a member of the community? Yes ☐ No ☐
4. Tell me about your **career path**:
 - Role and job within the community? _____
 - When did you start this job? _____
 - What job did you have before this one? _____
 - Are you in direct contact with homeless people? _____
 - If yes, specify what type of homelessness: _____

Types of homelessness present in the community and extent of the phenomenon

5. In your opinion, what forms of homelessness are currently present in your community? For each of them ask the respondent to estimate the frequency of each form and the profile for those living these situations:
 - ☐ **Homeless people** (people sleeping in the street, in the woods (in a camp or in a tent) or in structures such as cars, garages, etc.):
 - ☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent
 - Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____

- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing?²⁶ _____
- Proportion of males/females _____
- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.): _____

☐ **Temporarily sheltered by friends or family**

☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent

- Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____
- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing? _____
- Proportion of males/females _____
- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.)? _____

☐ **Homeless because threatened by domestic violence (family or partner)**

☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent

- Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____
- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing? _____
- Proportion of males/females _____
- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.): _____

☐ **People living in severely overcrowded conditions:**

☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent

- Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____
- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing? _____
- Proportion of males/females _____

²⁶ Refer to appendix b for to identify the explanatory factors.

- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.): _____

☐ **Living in inadequate housing (housing whose quality is a threat to the health and safety of its occupants):**

☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent

- Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____
- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing? _____
- Proportion of males/females _____
- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.): _____

☐ **Leaving institutions (hospital, detention, youth center):**

☐ Infrequent ☐ Rarely ☐ Frequent ☐ Very frequent

- Can you estimate the number of individuals living currently this situation? _____
- What are the main reasons why those people lose their housing? _____
- Proportion of males/females _____
- Proportion of youth (25 years or less)/adults/seniors _____
- Family situation (single, couple, parents) _____
- Origin (community or not) _____
- Can you specify the number and provenance of estimates (experience counts interventions, etc.): _____

6. What are the main **sources of income** of those persons? _____

7. Does your community collect information on the number of homeless people in the community? _____

- If so, would it be possible to obtain this information? _____

8. **Among the youth**, are those with a history of youth protection placement (inside or outside the community) particularly numerous? _____

- If so, can you specify which ones? _____

9. Does it happen that people live more than one situation during the year? _____

- If yes, please specify the number and situations in question. _____

10. Do you think some of the situations listed above should not be identified as homelessness? _____

- If yes, can you explain why: _____

Evolution of the phenomenon

11. Since the beginning of your involvement with homeless people, would you say that this phenomenon:

- ☐ has decreased
- ☐ has decreased slightly
- ☐ has remained stable (si « stable », passer à la question no. 13)
- ☐ has increased slightly
- ☐ has increased sharply

12. For what reason(s) do you think it has increased/decreased (if so)?

- Please specify which forms of homelessness we are mainly talking about: _____

13. Do these numbers tend to vary during the year (depending on the season or cultural activities for example)?

- If yes, how and for what reason(s)? _____

Migration and mobility of the homeless people

14. Among the homeless people that are on your territory, are there any people who come from other communities?

- If so, what is it that attracts them to your community? _____

Departures from the community:

15. Are there any homeless people who leave the community?

- If so, where do they go (city, another community, etc.) and for what reasons? _____
- If yes, from which organization do they receive support services? _____

Return to the community:

16. Do these people tend to return to the community? If so, why?

17. Do some of them travel particularly often (at least a few times over the course of a given year)?

- If so, who are these people and how do they experience these trips? In your opinion, do they contribute to weakening or improving their situation? _____
- When these people are back in the community, do they request certain services? If so, please specify.

In closing...

18. In an ideal world, if you had the power to change two things in order to reduce or prevent the prevalence of homelessness in your community, what would they be?

APPENDIX A

TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN QUEBEC

Conceptual category	Operational category	Generic category
Roofless	People living rough	Living in the streets, in public spaces, without accommodations
	People living in places not intended for human habitation	Living in garages, sheds, tents, makeshift shelters, cars, etc. (in the forest or on inhabited territory)
Houseless	People due to be released from institutions	- No housing available prior to release from penal institution, hospital stays or treatment/rehabilitation centre - No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)
	People living in shelters for victims of domestic abuse	People accommodated for a short period of time due to domestic abuse
Insecure housing	People living in insecure accommodations (couchsurfers)	- Provisionally accommodated by family or friends due to the lack of a permanent place to live - No lease (lease or sublease)
Inadequate housing	People living in unfit housing	Subquality dwelling that seriously compromises the health and/or safety of its occupants
	People living in extreme overcrowding	- Living in housing where the ratio of occupation is well in excess of one person per room - Overcrowding fosters social tensions inside the household

Note: This typology is inspired by the *Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion* (2007). The operational categories that are based on situations that are unlikely or even non-existent in the communities were removed and certain elements were added in order to only include the forms of homelessness that are possible in the context of the First Nations communities.

APPENDIX B

POSSIBLE REASONS WHY HOMELESS PEOPLE LOSE THEIR HOUSING

**Ne pas lire la liste. Utiliser seulement pour « uniformiser » les raisons évoquées par les répondants.

Financial problem	Imprisonment
Addiction to drugs/alcohol/	Discharge from hospital / treatment center
Separation (break up)	Release of a youth center
Overcrowding in housing	Problem with roommates
Gambling problem	Family tensions
Eviction by the owner	Job loss
Mental health problem	Fire
Violence/abuse	Death of a close one
Prostitution	Problem with the owner
Traumatism	Health problem
Expelled by the community	Personal choice
Infestation or unsanitary	Other :

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

Introduction to the interview:

- Explain to the respondent his or her rights with respect to his or her participation (confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw consent without prejudice, no obligation to answer every question, etc.) on the consent form.
- Inform the respondent of the approximate duration of the interview (about 90 minutes).
- After the respondent consents (signature), begin the interview with a synthesized overview of the **project context** (funding source, the new ground being broken by the portrait), and the **objectives** (4). Finally, inform the respondent that his or her participation in the project will contribute to a better understanding of the issues relating to homelessness in the communities, which is key to raising awareness of the different actors involved and reducing prejudice on the issue.
- **Record the interview:** Ask for the respondent's permission.

Description of the respondent's current situation

Respondent's gender: Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐

1. Can you tell me your age, at least approximately? _____
2. Education: _____
3. Are you in a couple (relationship)? _____
4. Do you have children/are you responsible for children under 18 years of age? _____
5. What are your sources of income and estimate the amount: _____

****Mention that the answers to these questions shall remain strictly confidentialia**

- | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| ☐ No income | ☐ Pension | ☐ Refusal |
| ☐ Social assistance | ☐ Full-time employment | ☐ Other |
| ☐ Disability benefits | ☐ Part-time employment | |
| ☐ Old age security | ☐ Full-time unreported employment | |
| ☐ Employment insurance | ☐ Part-time unreported employment | |
| ☐ Begging | ☐ Don't know | |

6. With which First Nations group do you identify? _____
7. Do you have your own home where you can spend the night if you want? _____
Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know ☐

If so, proceed to question no. 11.

8. Where do you currently sleep?

****Do not read the list, but rather check the appropriate situation.**

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Outdoors | ☐ Emergency shelter (outside the territory) |
| ☐ A makeshift shelter or tent on the land | ☐ Detoxification or therapy centre |
| ☐ Stay at someone else's place | ☐ Hospital |
| ☐ Shelter for victims of domestic violence | ☐ Housing unfit for human habitation |
| ☐ Second stage housing | ☐ Don't know |
| ☐ Car, garage, etc. | ☐ Other: |

9. For how long now (nights, weeks, months or years)?

10. Is this the only place you sleep or do you alternate with other places?

11. Do you share this place with other people? If so, how many?

Children: _____

Adults: _____

Adolescents : _____

Seniors: _____

12. In what general condition is this place? _____

- Do you have access to running water? _____
- Heating, sanitary, bathroom? _____
- Can you cook your meals? _____
- If not, how do you feed yourself? _____

13. How many times have you been homeless in your life? _____

14. Have you (or a member of your family) ever attended a residential school? _____

- If so, did this affect you (you or your family)? _____
- Specify how: _____

Mobility of the respondent

15. Where did you sleep before? _____

- Did your situation change more than once during the past year? _____
- If so, why? _____

16. Do you sometimes make trips outside of the community for periods of several days? _____

- If so, why? _____
- Where do you go (city, other community, etc.)? _____
- Why do you come back? _____

17. If the respondent comes from another community: What brought you here? _____

- How was life in this community? _____
- Would you like to go back? Why? _____

The participant's journey

18. Tell me your story...

- Tell me about the time when you lost your last permanent home? _____
 - How old were you? _____
 - Why did you have to leave? _____
 - What was your family and social situation at the time? _____
 - What choices were available to you and what decisions did you have to make? _____
- How did your first experience go? _____
 - Were you alone? _____
 - Where did you sleep? _____
- What are the main challenges that you are used to encountering? _____
 - How do you sleep? _____
 - How do you eat? _____
- How do you feel about the fact that you do not have your own home? _____

Health status of the respondent

19. How would you describe your current health status?

Good ☐ Average ☐ Poor ☐

- Can you explain why? _____
- For how long have you had this problem or these problems? _____

20. Do you drink alcohol or use drugs? _____

- If so, how often

Every day ☐ A few times/week ☐ A few times/month ☐ Never ☐

In closing:

21. Have you ever requested support or services in the community? _____

- If so, from who? _____
- Where do you go when you need help? _____

22. If you had a magic wand, what would you change about your life? What is your greatest hope? _____

APPENDIX 3

MEMO



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION

Wendake, October 19, 2015

MEMO

To: Health and social services directors, executive directors, Native Friendship Centres directors and general director of RCAAQ

Subject: Portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec²⁷ – Research project

Dear Sir/Madam,

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) is pleased to inform you that it is conducting a research project for purposes of establishing a portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec. This project, which will run until August 31, 2016, is being made possible through a grant received under the 2015-2020 inter-ministerial action plan on homelessness of the Government of Quebec.

Further to acquiring better knowledge of the causes that can lead people in our First Nations to homelessness or keep them in that situation, we hope by means of this portrait to better document this phenomenon and support decision makers and workers in their reflections concerning this matter. Lastly, we hope this project will help to reduce prejudice against First Nations and that the data collected will allow us to put forward practical actions to fight poverty, social exclusion and addictions.

Under this research project, the communities in Quebec, along with organizations offering services to First Nations who are in or at risk of being in a homelessness situation, will be invited to participate voluntarily in the gathering of information.

Objectives of the research

This research will allow us to document the phenomenon of homelessness in First Nations, by drawing up a portrait based on existing data and on data obtained through the project. Specifically, the research will:

- Document the phenomenon of hidden homelessness;
- Document the phenomenon of migration;
- Obtain a profile with the assistance of the main social determinants of health.

Information gathering

To collect the information necessary for documenting the phenomenon of homelessness, various strategies will be used. The FNQLHSSC research agent will review the literature to learn about the different research projects that have been conducted on this topic. She will also collect information from the contact people of the communities and organizations offering services to people who are in or at risk of being in a homelessness situation. Each of the information-gathering activities will be planned in such a way as to minimize the time that the participants will have to devote to that process. The information will be collected in this way from January 2016 to March 2016.

²⁷ This research does not target the Cree Nation or Inuit.

This research project will be conducted in accordance with the *First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Research Protocol* (AFNQL, 2014) and the principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP™) of information by the First Nations.

Research report

The report presenting the results of this research will, among other things, be validated by the project's participating communities and the committee of experts. The report will also be submitted to the different partners in the project.

If you would like to receive more information, please do not hesitate to contact Marie-France Harvey by telephone at 418-842-1540 (ext. 351) or by e-mail at mharvey@cssspnql.com.

Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh
Research Sector Manager

c.c. Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director – FNQLHSSC
Nadine Rousselot, Early Childhood Services Manager – FNQLHSSC
Niva Sioui, Social Development Manager – FNQLHSSC
Richard Gray, Social Services Sector Manager – FNQLHSSC
Sophie Picard, Health Services Manager – FNQLHSSC

APPENDIX 4

INVITATION LETTER



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
AND LABRADOR HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMISSION

Wendake, date

Re: Invitation to participate in a research project on homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec

Dear

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) will soon begin to collect information in First Nations communities in Quebec²⁸ as part of a research project on homelessness in these areas, and we are pleased to invite you to participate in this effort.

As indicated in the briefing note sent to you on October 22, this project consists in creating a portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec. Although several studies have examined First Nations homelessness in urban areas, little has been done to study this phenomenon within the communities. This portrait will serve to document the types of homelessness (visible and hidden) in the communities. Furthermore, through this research, we hope to gain a better understanding of the factors (housing crises, substance abuse, mental health, etc.) that are associated with or can lead to homelessness.

Ultimately, we want this information to contribute to reducing prejudice towards First Nations and lead to concrete actions to combat poverty, social exclusion and addiction.

This project, made possible by a grant received as part of the Quebec government's 2015-2020 Inter-ministerial Action Plan on Homelessness, will be ongoing until August 31, 2016.

Research objectives

This research will allow us to document the phenomenon of homelessness among First Nations by producing a portrait using existing data as well as the new data collected. Specifically, this research strives to:

- document the phenomenon of hidden homelessness
- document the phenomenon of migration
- create a profile using major social determinants of health

²⁸ This research does not target the Cree nation or the Inuit.

Data collection

Several strategies have been mobilized to collect the necessary information to document the phenomenon of homelessness. First, the FNQLHSSC's research agent conducted a literature review in order to become familiar with the different studies on this issue, and is now preparing to collect data from resource persons in communities that are concerned with homelessness and/or from people (and their loved ones) who have experienced homelessness. Each data collection activity will be carefully planned in order to minimize the time required of respondents. Data will be collected from January to March 2016.

Research ethics and confidentiality of data

This research project will be conducted in keeping with the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador's Research Protocol (AFNQL, 2014) and the principles of First Nations ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP™) of data. All information collected as part of this project will remain confidential. Under no circumstances will it be possible to use the findings presented in the final report to identify your community.

Research report

The report presenting the research findings will be validated by participating First Nations communities and the committee of experts created specifically for this project.

In order for your community to participate in this data collection project, we need your consent. To that end, please **complete the enclosed consent form and return it to the FNQLHSSC before December 11, 2015.**

For more information, please contact Marie-France Harvey at 418-842-1540, ext. 351, or mharvey@cssspnql.com.

Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh
Research Sector Manager

c.c. General Directors
Health and Social Services Directors
Marjolaine Sioui, Executive Director – FNQLHSSC
Nadine Rousselot, Early Childhood Services Manager – FNQLHSSC
Niva Sioui, Social Development Manager – FNQLHSSC
Richard Gray, Social Services Manager – FNQLHSSC
Sophie Picard, Health Services Manager – FNQLHSSC

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SECTION:

I hereby consent to the participation of my community, _____ (enter name of community), in the research project on homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec.

Signature of the Grand Chief / Chief:

Date :

Please return the **duly completed original** by mail to the attention of:

Marie-France Harvey, Research Agent
FNQLHSSC
250 Place Chef-Michel-Laveau, Suite 102
Wendake (Quebec) G0A 4V0

APPENDIX 5

CONSENT FORM

Title of project:

Portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec

Research team:

Marie-France Harvey
Research Agent, FNQLHSSC
mharvey@cssspnql.com
418-842-1540 (ext. 351)

Nancy Gros-Louis McHugh
Research Sector Manager, FNQLHSSC
Nancy.Gros-LouisMcHugh@cssspnql.com
418-842-1540 (ext. 238)

Funding source:

Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

Expected duration of research:

The project will span until August 31, 2016

Research objectives

- Document forms of homelessness present within communities, taking into account the issues related to hidden homelessness and the migration phenomenon;
- Establish a profile of the homeless population in First Nations communities in Quebec using the main determinants of health;
- Identify factors explaining homelessness;
- Assess the extent of homelessness among respondent communities.

Methodology used

The gathering of information will be conducted with resource people of Quebec First Nations communities who are familiar with the problem of homelessness in their community. Interviews (telephone or in person) of about 90 minutes will be carried out during the months of January, February and March 2016.

Benefits/risks

Participation in this project does not directly benefit the participant. The results of this research, however, could contribute to a better understanding of issues related to homelessness in the First Nations communities of Quebec. Furthermore, we hope that this knowledge will help to reduce prejudice against First Nations. Other than the time allowed for the interview, participation in the project does not present any known risks.

Protection of personal information

The information gathered will be treated confidentially. The report presenting the results of this research will not identify participants. Information will be validated, among others, by the participating communities and the committee of experts involved in the project.

Information retention period

The information gathered will be kept for five years following the end of the project. Afterward, they will be destroyed, according to the FNQLHSSC policy.

Questions

All questions regarding the research project can be addressed to Marie-France Harvey, the research agent attributed to the project (see contact information on previous page).

Liability clause

By agreeing to participate in this research, the participant does not waive any of his or her rights or relieve the principal investigator and the organizations and institutions involved from their legal and professional obligations towards him or her.

Right to refuse or withdraw

I have read the consent form and discussed my questions with the research agent. My participation in this research project is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without having to provide a reason, nor suffer any prejudice.

I the undersigned, _____ (*print name*), freely consent to participate in the research project entitled "Portrait of homelessness in First Nations communities in Quebec."

Signature of participant:

Date :

Name of research agent:

Marie-France Harvey

Date :

Signature of research agent:

Date :

APPENDIX 6

EUROPEAN TYPOLOGY ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION (ETHOS)

	Operational Category		Living Situation		Generic Definition
ROOFLESS	1	People Living Rough	1.1	Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
	2	People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter	People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
			3.2	Temporary Accommodation	
			3.3	Transitional supported accommodation	
	4	People in Women's Shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation / reception centres	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
			5.2	Migrant workers accommodation	
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
INSECURE			6.2	Medical institutions (*)	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
			6.3	Children's institutions / homes	No housing identified (e.g by 18 th birthday)
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
			7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	
	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends	Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy	Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land	Occupation of land with no legal rights
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	Where orders for eviction are operative
			9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess
	10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence
INADEQUATE	11	People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes	Not intended as place of usual residence
			11.2	Non-conventional building	Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty
			11.3	Temporary structure	Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations
	13	People living in extreme over-crowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; Long stay is defined as more than one year. This definition is compatible with Census definitions as recommended by the UNECE/EUROSTAT report (2006)

(*) Includes drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals etc.

Source : <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article121&lang=en>



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC
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Culture

Dignity

Health

Communities

Nations

Addiction

Esteem

Trauma

Abuse

Poverty

Individual

Family

Mobility

Refuge

