



Myths Versus Facts on Encampments- Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness:

Myth:

People staying in encampments have rejected housing offers.

Fact:

Many of the housing options offered to people are not permanent forms of housing, but a temporary shelter bed, or a motel. These are often institutionalized settings with rules that many people find encroach on their autonomy. While these are options that may be right for some people, many staying in encampments want permanent affordable housing options.

Many people have also chosen encampments rather than shelters for fear of outbreaks of COVID due to the congregate indoor setting.

Myth:

People choose encampments because they do not want housing.

Fact:

The majority of people who are staying in encampments want permanent affordable housing. Homelessness is not a choice people make unless there are no options available that meet their needs.

Myth:

Clearing encampments will make them go away.

Fact:

Clearing encampments results in people being displaced, away from the supports they were relying on, to other precarious and sometimes more dangerous options. The problem is not solved. Sustainable affordable housing is the solution to making encampments go away.

Myth:

Police responses are needed to reduce homelessness.

Fact:

It is increasingly common to criminalize homelessness. People who are homeless are routinely ticketed for panhandling or loitering, and forcibly removed from public spaces, businesses, and stores.

Rather than stopping homelessness, this only increases the barriers people face. Ticketing results in greater debt that a person on a limited income cannot afford to pay.

Myth:

Encampments are dangerous, including issues with fire safety and drug use.

Fact:

While there have been issues with fire and safety in encampments, these numbers can often be inflated¹ and do not take into consideration the level of risk associated with other options available to people experiencing homelessness, such as staying in a shelter, sleeping alone outside, or couch-surfing. These are “choices” between several unsafe options, and people choose what feels the most safe to them.

Myth:

People staying in encampments are not allowed to be there.

Fact:

People staying in encampments and experiencing homelessness have a legal right to housing in international law. While local responses to encampments have varied, if there are not sustainable housing options available, we should not be evicting people in encampments.

Myth:

Homelessness is a personal choice.

Fact:

Homelessness is due to poor policy decisions that drastically defunded social housing in Canada for the past 40 years, compounded by additional policy choices that have allowed social assistance rates and minimum wages to fall well below the costs of living. Better policy decisions that prioritize creating more affordable housing can help to end homelessness.

Myth:

Shelters are a solution for ending homelessness.

Fact:

Shelters do not end homelessness, they manage it. Long-term stays in shelters actually cost society more than providing social housing or rent supplements and supports. Many individuals experiencing homelessness would rather not stay in a shelter because they can be crowded and unsafe.

It's been proven that permanent housing with wrap-around supports are the only way to effectively end homelessness. Many communities are adapting a collaborative model that helps individuals and families find housing and support based on their needs.

¹ <http://policinghomelessness.ca/mapOne.html>

Resources

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/myths-and-questions-about-homelessness>

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/housing-first>

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/ending-homelessness>