

PEI Report Card on Homelessness

April, 2010

The **PEI Report Card on Homelessness** documents the current state of homelessness in Prince Edward Island using indicators that monitor changes in homelessness, housing and income. The aim of the first report card is to profile homelessness in PEI and to introduce some of the organizations and programs that are working to reduce the impact of homelessness. Future report cards will measure progress over time.

This data will enable government and non-profit organizations, as well as shelter and service providers, to identify gaps in the system and to develop responsive strategies.

What is Homelessness?

- > Living on the Street
- > Staying overnight in a temporary shelter
- > Staying in places not meant for human habitation
- > Moving continuously among temporary arrangements provided by strangers, friends or family (couch surfing)

242 people were homeless and stayed in a shelter in Prince Edward Island at some point in 2009



A Sleeping bag and backpack on the Confederation Trail

Who is at risk of homelessness?

Families and individuals can lose their housing for any number of reasons including fleeing abuse, losing a job, or having an income too low to stay in suitable housing. Some are at risk because of mental illness or substance use problems, or they may lack the life skills or ability to live on their own.

This report card deals with both the homeless and the working poor by reporting on issues that affect both populations. The working poor are most at risk of becoming homeless.

Statement by someone who experienced frequent homelessness:

"A home is a place of peace, rest and love. The largest reason for pain and loneliness is not having a place to call your own. To have a home is to say, in effect someone or something care, because a home is a gift of life, a gift of security, a gift of pride, a place to make a new start, a place to collect your small treasures, a place of our own freedom and peace, a place where you can choose your friends and what you can eat, a place you can choose your own music, movies, and stories of friendship, love, and excitement. Is it ever nice going out and coming home. You feel secure, this is my place and nobody else can get in. What a difference a home makes."

Homelessness Indicators (Data Jan 1 - Dec 31, 2009)	2009
Population of PEI (July 1 st official estimation)	140,985
Number of emergency shelter beds in PEI	44
Number of Individuals who stayed in a shelter	242
Number of women	117
Number of men	46
Number of youth (age 16-19)	17
Number of families	38
Number of children accompanying a parent (age 0-18)	62
Number of times shelter beds were used	5428
Average length of stay in emergency shelter (days)	29
Number of individuals "turned away" from shelters	68
Number of food banks	6
Number of soup kitchens	2

Housing Indicators (Data Apr 1, 2008 - Mar 31, 2009)	2008/9
Number of provincial Family Housing units	476
Number on the provincial Family Housing waiting list	401
Approximate annual turnover rate for Family Housing	18.5%
Number of provincial Senior Housing units	1,152
Number on provincial Seniors Housing units waiting list	410
Approximate annual turnover rate for Senior Housing	14.7%
Number of provincial rent supplements	18
Units in Canada-PEI Affordable Housing Program (Mar, 2008)	120
PEI overall rental vacancy rate (urban centres) (Oct, 2009)	3.1%
Average rent for bachelor apartment (Oct, 2009)	\$447
Average rent for 1-Bedroom apartment (Oct, 2009)	\$554
Average rent for 2-Bedroom apartment (Oct, 2009)	\$688

*Rents are a Summerside/Charlottetown average

Income Indicators (Data Apr 1, 2008 - Mar 31, 2009)	2008/9
Basic monthly income support for a single person	\$586
Basic monthly income support for single person who is disabled and/or unable to work	\$769
Individuals on PEI who accessed social assistance benefits	5,487
Average monthly benefit for Old Age Security (OAS) (Jan, 10)	\$489.25
Average monthly Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) (Jan, 10)	\$446.61
Minimum wage in PEI (Oct, 2009)	\$8.40/hr
Increase in Consumer Price Index (PEI) (Dec, 08 to Dec, 09)	3%

**For more information on the contents of this report card, please contact the PEI Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness:
Tel: 902-367-3356.**

An electronic copy of this report is available at:
http://fvps.ca/sites/default/files/images/Report_Card.pdf

PEI Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness

The report card is published by the PEI Community Advisory Committee (CAC) on Homelessness, an inter-agency committee representing non-profit and public sector agencies that work with the homeless population or those at risk of becoming homeless in PEI. The Community Advisory Committee also works to create public awareness about issues surrounding homelessness, poverty and housing.

Members of the PEI Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness include representatives from:

Bedford MacDonald House Inc.
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Canadian Mental Health Association (PEI Division)
Charlottetown Boys & Girls Club
City of Charlottetown
City of Summerside
Community Connections Inc.
Dept of Community Services, Seniors and Labour
East Prince Youth Development Centre
Habitat for Humanity
John Howard Society of PEI
Native Council of PEI
PEI Family Violence Prevention Services Inc.
Salvation Army-Charlottetown
Salvation Army- Summerside
Service Canada
Veteran Affairs Canada- PEI District Office

Explanatory Notes:

1. Homelessness Indicators:

Emergency Shelters: In PEI there are four emergency shelters in operation, including Anderson House (20 beds), Bedford MacDonald House (6 beds) and Grandmother's House (6 beds) in Charlottetown and the Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Shelter (12 beds) in Lennox Island. There are no emergency shelters in operation in the City of Summerside. PEI Addiction Services operates an overnight shelter unit (Deacon House) in Charlottetown that provides shelter for males who abuse substances or have a chemical dependency. Data for Deacon House is not included in the summary of the data on shelters.

Food Banks: In PEI there are 6 public food banks including the Upper Room Hospitality Ministry Inc. Food Bank, the Salvation Army Food Bank in Charlottetown, the Southern Kings and Queens Food Bank in Montague, the Souris Food Bank, the Salvation Army Food Bank in Summerside and the West Prince Caring Cupboard in Alberton. AIDS PEI also operates a food bank for their clients. There may be other food banks in operation for specific clients in the province; however, there are only six food banks in the province that are open to the general public.

Explanatory Notes Continued...

There are two soup kitchens in the province: the Upper Room Hospitality Ministry Inc. in Charlottetown and the Salvation Army Soup Kitchen in Summerside.

2. Housing & Income Indicators:

Provincial family housing provides subsidized housing to low and moderate income families who are unable to obtain adequate and affordable accommodation in the private market place. The units with rents based on 25% of income are situated in nine communities across the province.

Provincial seniors housing units are located in 37 communities across the province and provide apartment style rental units to low and moderate income seniors who are unable to meet their housing needs independently. The rent for seniors housing is 25% of income.

The Rent Supplement Program utilizes private market housing to provide accommodations for families selected from the family housing waiting lists. Rents are made affordable for the families via rent subsidies.

The Canada-PEI Affordable Housing Agreement was signed in 2003. Funding under this agreement is used to create new, additional affordable housing units for low to moderate income Islanders through rental, conversion and home ownership initiatives. The program is administered by the PEI Department of Community Services, Seniors and Labour and the PEI Housing Corporation.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is an indicator of changes in consumer prices experienced by Canadians. This is obtained by comparing through time, the cost of a fixed basket of commodities purchased by Canadians including food, shelter, household operations, clothing and footwear, transportation, etc.

3. Sources of Information

Sources of information for this first report card on homelessness in PEI include the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), a national data information system on homeless shelters in Canada, CMHC Rental and Housing Market Reports, Statistics Canada, Government of Canada Labour Market Information, PEI Housing Corporation Annual Reports, PEI Department of Social Service & Seniors (PEI Dept of Community Services, Seniors and Labour), and PEI Department of the Provincial Treasury.

The **PEI Helping Tree** included with this report card was created by the Canadian Mental Health Association's Suicide Prevention Committee, as adapted from the original design by the Grand Falls' Suicide Prevention Committee. It is designed to inform Islanders of the many helping resources available on PEI. There are times when we need to reach out to others- sometimes it is just a matter of knowing how to contact them. For more information, please contact CMHA or visit their website; www.cmha.pe.ca

Housing Affordability

CMHC defines affordable housing as costing less than 30% of before-tax household income. For renters, shelter costs include any payment for electricity, fuel, water, and other municipal services. Based on labour market information, the following table illustrates there are several occupations in PEI that are struggling to maintain rental accommodations in comparison to those occupations whose income is more than sufficient to maintain suitable housing.

Type of Work	30% of monthly wage	Bachelor Apartment	1 Bedroom Apartment	2 Bedroom Apartment
		\$447*	\$554*	\$688*
Butcher & Meat Cutter	\$604	✓	✓	✗
Bakers	\$535	✓	✗	✗
Carpenters	\$900	✓	✓	✓
Cashier	\$453	✓	✗	✗
Customer Service Rep- Finance	\$607	✓	✓	✗
Early Childhood Educator & Teacher's Ass't	\$513	✓	✗	✗
Hotel Front Desk Clerk	\$487	✓	✗	✗
Nurse (Registered)	\$1,399	✓	✓	✓
Nurse Aides, Orderlies, etc	\$667	✓	✓	✗
Plumber	\$924	✓	✓	✓
Retail Sales Persons & Sales Clerk	\$520	✓	✗	✗
Storekeeper & Parts Clerk	\$648	✓	✓	✗
Teacher (Secondary)	\$1,147	✓	✓	✓
Travel Counsellor	\$619	✓	✓	✗
User Support Technician	\$571	✓	✓	✗

*Average monthly rent according to CMHC Oct 2009 data.

Is a significant percentage of your income going towards housing?

The table above demonstrates the reality that even people in PEI working for more than minimum wage can find themselves spending over 30% of their gross income on rent.

Currently, an individual working 40 hours a week in PEI at minimum wage would need to pay **41%** of their gross salary for an average one bedroom apartment.

Why a 30% threshold?

Households have many demands on their income, including providing for basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing. In low income households especially, the more spent on shelter, the less is available for other basic needs. However, to be productive and contributing members of society, people also need the financial means to be included in that society. Spending only on basics, or having to make a choice between food and rent, reduces a low income household's ability to participate in the broader society.



Notes

1. This table applies to a single wage earner only;

and

2. Many of the employees working in these occupations are not working on a full-time basis and may also be seasonally employed, thus impacting their ability to maintain adequate housing

Number of households on PEI spending over 30% of their gross income on rent	
30-34%	1,505
35-39%	905
40-49%	1,215
50% +	2,065

41% of Islanders living in rental accommodations pay more than 30% of their gross income.





Marj Montgomery
Summerside, PE

“When you see people with smaller children come in it is really difficult to watch.”

“The idea of the room is to provide a warm, judgment free environment where people can stop by to get out of the cold for a little while.”



Canned goods at the
Food Bank

The Salvation Army Across PEI

Summerside

The Salvation Army Thrift Shop is one piece of a larger effort including a Food Bank and Soup Kitchen to help those in need in Summerside and greater Prince County. Named Volunteer Organization of the Year in Summerside, they serve an average over 1,000 meals per month in their soup kitchen and the Food Bank gives out between 150 to 250 food hampers monthly. Some of the people we see may not otherwise eat a hot meal that day, said Community and Family Services Coordinator in Summerside Marj Montgomery.

“When you see people with smaller children come in it is really difficult to watch.” While the community support for the Salvation Army’s efforts in Summerside has been tremendous, it is not enough by itself, said Montgomery. She says the area needs a full time shelter.

In the past when presented with those in need of shelter the

first course of action has been to contact other shelters on the Island, including Bedford MacDonald House in Charlottetown and the Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women’s Shelter in Lennox Island. “We are very fortunate in Prince County to have the shelter in Lennox Island, but that is for women.”

If the need for shelter arises at night it often falls on the Salvation Army to deal with it, usually finding a hotel or motel room for those in need, said Montgomery. The Salvation Army is often the organization police in the area go to when they have a homelessness issue they don’t know how to address.

Right now the services at the Salvation Army are largely supported by local churches and businesses as well as individual donations and volunteers. A shelter would not be sustainable without a long-term source of income. Homelessness is not always clearly visible in the

area, said Montgomery. There are many people who are couch-surfing or have been taken in by friends or family and while it may not seem as bad as sleeping on the street it can certainly be a stressful situation, Montgomery added.

“I think that a lot of us hate to admit that we have homelessness in Summerside, but we do.” One stumbling block for maintaining a shelter is sustainability, said Montgomery. There is sometimes money available to assist with a shelter but there is often no way to plan for the future.

“When you are non-profit you can’t foresee where your money is going to come from to sustain it.” While it is not always clearly visible to everybody, poverty exists in the area, said Montgomery. She said that you only need to look at the number of people who access the food bank and soup kitchen every month.

Charlottetown

Like every holiday season, this year volunteers were very busy at the Charlottetown Salvation Army building. Near the entrance was a large pile made up of bags of potatoes donated by local farmers. Inside toys were stacked on a table to be given to children in need. Volunteers also packed Christmas food hampers. A huge stack of boxes in the middle of the room waited to be filled with food to be distributed before Christmas.

It was a busy time for the Salvation Army. On top of its Christmas programs and seasonal fund-raising activities the Salvation Army also runs a year-round food bank in Charlottetown which helps close to 200 families per month, said Lieutenant Ian Scott of the Salvation Army.

It also provides a friendship room which is used by 30 to 50 people daily. The idea of the room is to provide a warm,

judgment free environment where people can stop by to get out of the cold for a little while, said Scott. “We get coffee and doughnuts, and clothing donations. People are free to drop by whenever they need to.”

Though some people are in need of shelter, most of Scott’s clients seem to be the working poor. “Most of them seem to have shelter.” Many of the food bank’s clients are families on social assistance or seniors who use the service on a repeat basis. They are trying to stretch what little money they have to the point that they can live on it, said Scott. Although most of the people assisted do seem to have shelter, it is often not a good situation, said Scott.

“They are finding shelter but are not stable in any sense of the word.” You may not see people sleeping in doorways, but that doesn’t mean home-

lessness does not exist here, said Scott. “If you are not part of it, you don’t notice it until you need to.”

Scott said he believes there are many great organizations in the area offering good services that could be expanded. The community in general is often willing to lend a hand when it is needed but they don’t always know how or where they can get involved.

Though Charlottetown may not have resources available to a larger city, its small population can be of benefit to those working with people in need, said Scott. He said the small population can sometimes help to build a bigger sense of community, bringing people together when they know there is help needed. “Charlottetown is small enough and open enough to make a connection (in the community).”

The Upper Room Hospitality Ministry Inc.

Opening its doors in the mid 80's, the Upper Room Hospitality Ministry Food Bank in Charlottetown has helped over 10,000 people over the years. On average, the food bank provides food to about 500 households per month. That equates to about 1,800 people with about 40% of them under the age of 18, said manager Mike MacDonald.

The food bank's mission is to provide people with at least a three-day supply of food once per month, said MacDonald. He said the idea is to help people stretch what money they do have as far as they can.

In order to keep going the food bank relies entirely on the generosity of others as the food is generally donated to them or purchased with donated money. "It's all through either personal donations or corporate donations."

As well as the food bank, they also run a soup kitchen in downtown Charlottetown. It serves on average about 3,000 meals a month, said manager Bob King. King said he is glad to help but said he looks forward to a day when the kitchen is serving less people.

"The more meals we have to serve, the harder of a time people are having."

The soup kitchen has also been fortunate to receive donations and reduced prices, some of the donations even coming from off-Island, said King.

Volunteers with specialized cooking or nutritional knowledge are also a key part of helping to maintain food levels, said King. He said volunteers who specialize in things like vegetarian cooking have done a lot to help stretch his supply of meat.

He also gets support from the clients who use the kitchen, as clients will also volunteer their time to help maintain it.

"These are not lazy people, they are just down for the time being."

Another fortunate thing for the kitchen is that it is one of the only soup kitchens housed in a building that is owned by the organization that runs it, said King. He said the building itself was built and donated by a group of community Rotary Clubs.

Another unique aspect of the kitchen is its hours of operation. Often soup kitchens are only open for short times during lunch or dinner, but King keeps the doors open from 8:30 a.m. until 6 p.m.

King said the kitchen has

been fortunate in the past to have received aid from other groups, but said he and the volunteers work hard to maintain the food and equipment.

Homelessness in P.E.I. is often of a hidden nature, said MacDonald. Often times it is people forced to live with friends or family, whether or not they can afford to take them in, or people forced into substandard living conditions like six or seven people sharing a one-bedroom apartment, said MacDonald. "They do have a roof over their heads, but not much else."

Whatever the future holds, MacDonald said he does not believe there is an easy solution. "It's certainly not an issue that's going to be solved in the short term."

On average, the Food Bank provides food to about 500 households per month. This represents about 1800 people, 41% under 18.

The Soup Kitchen serves an average of 3000 meals per month.



Dedicated Upper Room / Food Bank Staff



Pictured Left to Right:: Peter Wu, Ian Scott & Lori Wu

The PEI Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness has identified youth between the ages of 16 to 18 in need of housing, support and programming as a priority. The lack of housing options including emergency shelter and long-term transitional housing, as well as housing support services for youth in the Cities of Charlottetown and Summerside have been of increasing concern of the Committee for the past several years.

In order to begin to address this concern, the Community Advisory Board approved Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding for the John Howard Society of PEI to conduct a study on the need and demand for housing and support services for youth between the ages of 16 and 18 in the cities of Charlottetown and Summerside.

In May, 2009, the John Howard Society of PEI contracted with Mount Allison University through their Rural and Small Town Programme to conduct this study. The research will prepare a "business case" outlining the scope of a potential building or structure, as well as services in Charlottetown and Summerside to meet the needs of homeless youth and to prevent/reduce the likelihood of youth homelessness.

This project is significant because of the growth in the number of youth in need of some type of housing services and related programs. Youth do not easily fit into most existing programs, services, and facilities. There is overlap and duplication in some cases; but more often than not there is a "gap" in the ability of existing services to respond to youth needs.

The comprehensive research project involves a literature review and case study documentation, interviews, extensive primary and secondary data collection, and critical reflection to prepare a definitive analysis and business case. The research phase is nearing completion and the report written by staff of the Rural and Small Town of Mt A. University will be submitted to the Community Advisory Committee in April, 2010 and will include recommendations on how best to proceed.

Once the final report is approved by the Community Advisory Committee, a copy of the report will be available to the public by contacting the John Howard Society of PEI, 163 Queen St, Charlottetown, PEI, telephone 902-367-3356.

Homelessness in Rural PEI Research Project

In September 2008, the John Howard Society of PEI received funding from Service Canada under the Homelessness Partnership Strategy to research the issue of homelessness in rural areas of PEI. The research project was carried out by staff of the Atlantic Evaluation Group Inc. in Charlottetown, PEI.

The key activities carried out included:

- A literature review looking at homelessness issues in rural areas; and
- Interviews with 37 key stakeholders and service providers who work with individuals/families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The research report, completed in March, 2009 includes the following conclusions:

"The literature review and key stakeholder and service provider interviews show that homelessness has always been and continues to be an issue. Although we are not seeing much absolute homelessness in rural PEI, we are increasing seeing more relative homelessness. The populations experiencing homelessness are diverse and require diverse solutions. PEI appears to have a relatively good range of supportive services in place to help these individuals/families address their personal issues but limited homelessness specific services aimed at directly assisting them in accessing safe and affordable short-term and permanent housing. In addition, most of the support services are located in Charlottetown and Summerside which limits accessibility; individuals/families living in more rural communities have difficulties accessing them due to barriers such as lack of transportation and limited financial resources."

"To address these issues and to truly help individuals/families dealing with homelessness issues, the report concludes that "there needs to be better access to services and supports in smaller communities and more focus on direct housing services (i.e. temporary shelters, more subsidized housing, better income support, etc) that will help individuals and families obtain and maintain permanent housing that is safe, affordable and secure."

A copy of the full report is available by contacting the John Howard Society of PEI, 163 Queen St., Charlottetown, PEI, telephone 902-367-3356.

Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter - Lennox Island

The Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter was opened on Lennox Island in July 2007. Its mission is to provide a safe and comfortable environment for women and their children who are facing situations involving homelessness or abuse. Since opening, it has provided shelter to 30 women and 22 children.

Named after the first female Chief of the Lennox Island Band, and funded by Indian Northern Affairs Canada, the shelter currently has six full time staff members and four casual employees.

In addition to providing a safe place for women to live, the shelter's staff also helps clients find long term housing and provides employment counseling with the purpose of helping women regain independence.

"Originally the shelter was set up to provide services to band

members in the native community but over the years it has assisted women from all over P.E.I.," said manager Melissa Cooke. "We've had women come from other communities who for different reasons just didn't want to go into Charlottetown," said Cooke.

"The shelter offers both short-term emergency housing, which can be anywhere from one day to as long as six weeks, and long-term stays for band members which can be as long as one or sometimes two years depending on the situation," said Cooke.

"The long-term stay was set up to allow women to eventually find a home of their own while working on employment and other life skills," said Cooke. "Because it can sometimes take a long time for either subsidized housing to become available or

even to save enough for a damage deposit on an apartment, it is good for women to know they at least have a warm, safe place for themselves and their children," she said.

Before the shelter opened there were very few options for women facing homelessness in the Prince County area, said Cooke. "Before we opened there were no shelters west of Charlottetown."

Although she hasn't dealt with many women forced to live on the streets, she said there have been those who have come to the shelter from sub-standard living conditions or who might have been homeless if the shelter didn't exist.

"They might not be on the street but they might be very close to being on the street."

Pictured right, a room at the Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter.

"They might not be on the street but they might be very close to being on the street."



Report Card Recommendations

Why hasn't homelessness ended yet? *The PEI Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness responds...*

Governments need to commit to policies that will end homelessness.

Federal:

1. Create a National Housing Strategy which clearly defines direct federal responsibility for funding affordable housing, supportive housing, and supported housing including putting in place long-term and sustained funding to support the community's capacity to end homelessness.
2. Increase significantly the rates of and access to federal income programs such as Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.
3. Continue and enhance Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) programs and funding initiatives for new affordable housing units for persons with disabilities and/or others in need such as low income, youth, seniors, persons with mental illness.
4. Conduct international research on global best practices in the prevention and the reduction of homelessness.

Provincial:

1. Develop and implement a Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy that includes additional units of family and senior housing.
2. Increase Income Assistance and Income Assistance Disability Support Program benefits including tying the rates to actual average rents in the community.
3. Provide leadership in ensuring that all Islanders have a liveable income which allows families and individuals to meet their basic needs and to actively participate in the community.
4. Develop and implement long term and stable funding for established registered organizations who work directly with the homeless or those at risk of being homeless such as funding to Salvation Army for those in need of assistance with home heating costs.

Municipal:

1. Commit resources to support community non-profit housing projects including supporting non-profit housing providers through project grants, tax and fee exemptions, and land donations.
2. Continue advocacy with the provincial and federal governments to promote affordable housing as good social policy.
3. Contribute financially to programs that address homelessness at the street level.

What can you do as a member of the community?

1. Contact local charities and non-profit organizations in your community and offer to volunteer, make a financial donation, or ask what the organization needs and then provide it.
2. Welcome all types of housing in your neighbourhood and help change attitudes about homelessness among your friends and people within the community to help reduce NIMBY ("Not in My Backyard") syndrome.
3. Education yourself and learn more about the issues surrounding homelessness including becoming aware of the language you use and refrain from using words that refer to people experiencing homelessness in derogatory ways.