Homeless people are extremely vulnerable to serious physical and mental health problems.

Homeless people are frequent victims of assault, rape, and injury.

It can be very difficult for homeless people to take care of themselves, and to access the health care they need.

The average homeless person in Toronto will die before the age of 50.

### Physical Health Issues

- Chronic medical conditions such as seizures, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, arthritis, and other musculoskeletal disorders are common among homeless people.
- Respiratory tract infections, oral and dental disease, and skin and foot problems are also common.
- Three-quarters of homeless people in Toronto reported that they lived with extreme fatigue, and 1 in 7 said they were usually in severe pain.

### Mental Health & Substance Use Issues

- Between one-quarter and one-third of people who are homeless have a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, or bipolar affective disorder. The estimates are higher for some population groups. For example, in Toronto, three-quarters of homeless single women have a mental illness.
- Almost three-quarters of shelter users in Toronto have been diagnosed with substance abuse or dependence.
- One-quarter of people who are homeless in Toronto have a concurrent disorder. A concurrent disorder is a combination of mental health and substance use problems. People who are homeless and have a concurrent disorder are more socially isolated, more likely to be physically assaulted, have worse health status, and have poorer access to shelter than other homeless people.

### Injury and Assault

- Almost half of homeless people in Toronto have been assaulted at least once in the past year, and almost one-quarter of homeless women have been sexually assaulted or raped at least once in the past year.
- A history of serious head injury is very common among people who are homeless. A recent CRICH study found that the roots of homelessness may sometimes lie in a past brain injury.

### Barriers to Health Care

- Despite their high need, people who are homeless encounter many barriers to receiving health care. Common barriers include: refusal of care because a patient is not carrying their provincial health card; inability to get to physicians’ offices during regular office hours; feelings of stigmatization; and/or lack of transportation to health visits.

### Early Death

- The average lifespan of homeless people in Canada is 7-10 years shorter than the general Canadian population. A recent CRICH study found that homeless men in Canada have about the same chance of surviving to age 75 as an average man in 1921 - before the advent of antibiotics.
- In Toronto, homeless people are 2-10 times more likely to die than the general Canadian population. CRICH studies show that on average, homeless men in Toronto die at 46, and homeless women die at 39.

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**PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES**

1-12

**MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES**

13, 14

**INJURY AND ASSAULT**

15

**BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE**

16

**EARLY DEATH**

17

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INFECTIONOUS DISEASE

- People who are homeless are at much higher risk of contracting infectious disease like tuberculosis, HIV, and Hepatitis C, compared to the general population (18-30).

- Nearly one-quarter of homeless people in Toronto have Hepatitis C (30), compared with less than one percent of the Canadian population. Hepatitis C is commonly transmitted through the sharing of drug-use equipment like needles, straws and pipes. 94% of homeless people with Hepatitis C in Toronto said they had used substances in the past year to help cope with stress or pain, or to feel better about their lives (30).

BARRIERS TO SELF CARE

- Homelessness entails a daily struggle for the essentials of life. These competing priorities can lead people who are homeless to “discount” their health in favour of other, more critical, day-to-day needs.

- In Toronto, almost three-quarters of homeless people with diabetes report difficulties managing their condition. These difficulties are usually related to diet and scheduling (10).

- Coordinating meals with medications can also be difficult if a person often goes hungry - two-thirds of homeless people report being hungry at least one day a week (30).