

DARO

Data That Makes A Difference 2025

Data Infrastructure for the Homelessness Sector

May 2025





Agenda

1. The Challenge

2. Health: An Alternative Approach for Data

3. Changing Paradigms

4. Discussion



DARO

DARO is a consulting firm that strengthens information flows across organizations and ecosystems to drive social impact.

We help nonprofits, foundations, government agencies, and networks harness data to generate purposeful insights and implement sustainable strategies – creating more responsive, effective systems for the communities they serve.



Texas 2036 & States for the Future

Building a data ecosystem for an optimized workforce, engaging various stakeholders to collect and share vital data.



Mastercard Foundation (MCF) Enterprise Data Management and Infrastructure

Shared infrastructure for managing and using program data for decision-making, ensuring efficient and effective scaling up investments in impactful areas.



Context

Making The Shift (MtS) is co-led by **A Way Home Canada** and the **Canadian Observatory on Homelessness**. Making the Shift is building an evidence base on youth homelessness prevention that supports programming and policy decisions that will better coordinate systems, break down silos, and reorient investments away from a crisis response to youth homelessness to foreground the importance of prevention.



1.

The Problem

We need more robust information infrastructure that can help us **prevent youth homelessness, not just manage it.**

Currently, the sector's data infrastructure:

- Is under-developed, disconnected, and inaccessible
- Is lacking an inclusive and effective planning function with clear direction





Challenges to The Use of Data for Prevention

1

Researchers don't have the **access to the right data** to inform prevention

2

Varying data collection standards and laws **prevent useful data from being linked**

3

Service provider's lack of capacity leads to **poor data quality**

4

Lackluster consent processes for data collection can cause harm to youth

1.

The Current System



Not Leveraging Existing Data



Vital data found in **education, health, and foster-care** systems that could be used for prevention **are currently left out.**

No planning function



Limited function of forward planning.

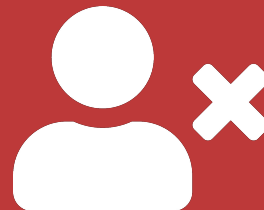
Result: the data infrastructure doesn't incorporate the data needs of many stakeholders.

Dyadic Relationship

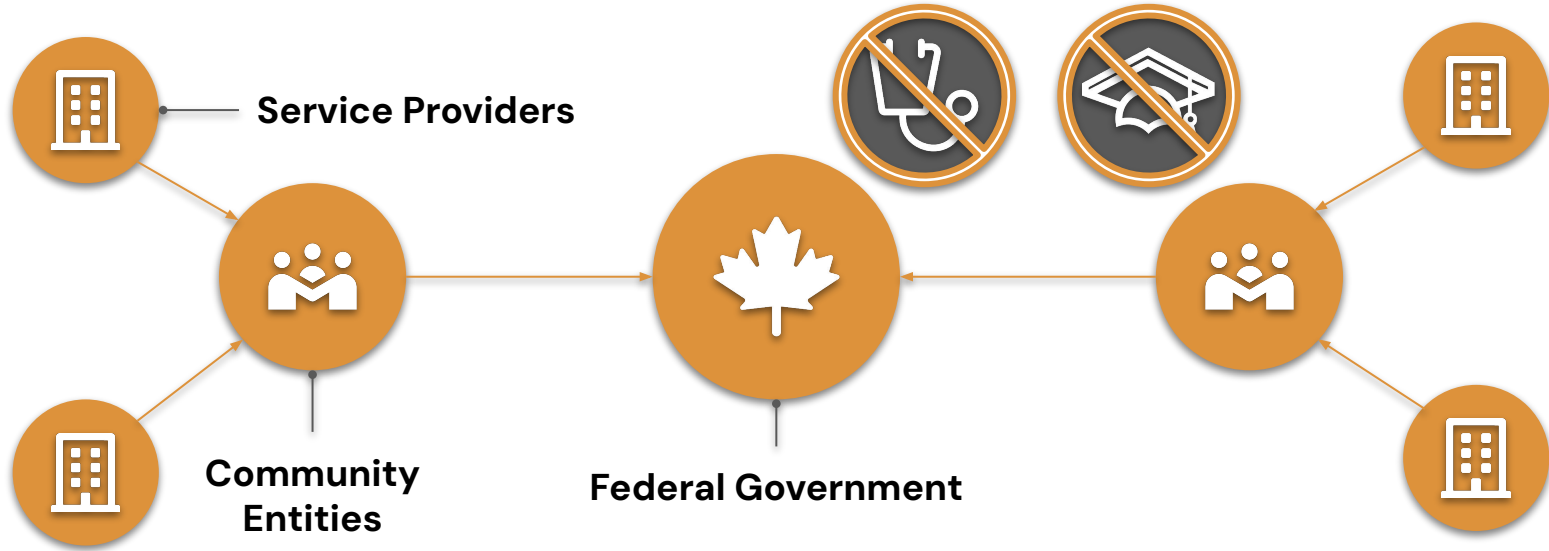


Current community-federal information flows **bypass** many important stakeholders, **especially at the provincial level.**

Inaccessible

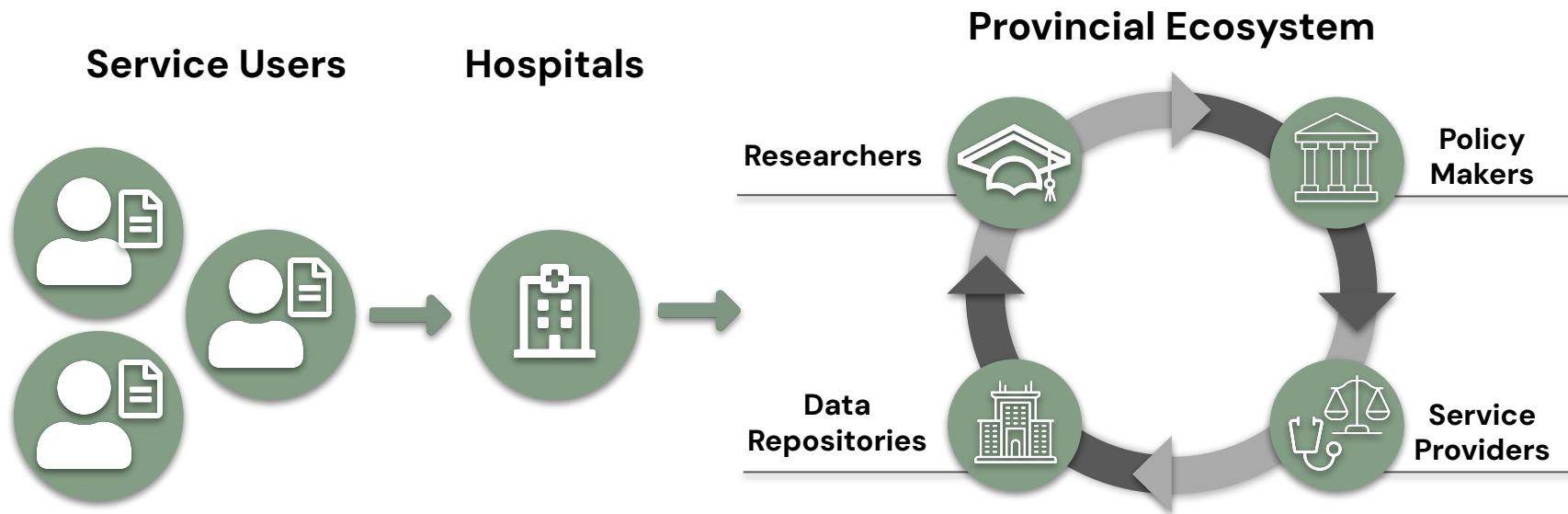


Stakeholders who should be involved and able to contribute data **are excluded.**

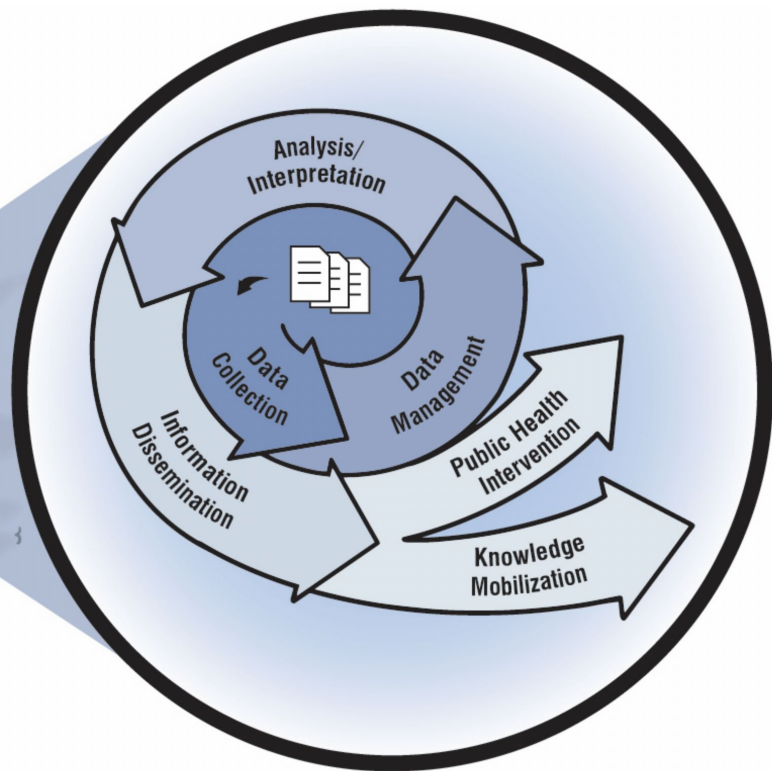


HIFIS is a homelessness management system, not a prevention system

- Homelessness is a holistic problem (connected to health, education, foster care, etc.), but our infrastructure encourages a siloed approach.
- Excluding provinces and territories has consequences (negative and positive).



The data enters into an ecosystem with defined roles that can manage illnesses and support prevention [research]



According to the [Vision 2030](#) report by the Public Health Agency of Canada, there are five themes identified by health sector stakeholders:

1. Unified purpose and governance
2. Inclusive partnerships
3. Well-supported workforce
4. Integrated health information
5. Operational efficiency

Health data moves in a systematic fashion
AND

There is clear shared vision for how the data infrastructure can be improved in the future



Réseau de recherche sur les données de santé du Canada
Health Data Research Network Canada



Social Data Linkage Environment

Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada



Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research
SPOR
Putting Patients First



PolicyWise
for Children & Families



FINAL REPORT

A Roadmap for Youth Homelessness Data Infrastructure



PolicyWise
for Children & Families

Canada



MAKING
THE SHIFT



University of
Lethbridge

The project was conducted by Dr. Yale Belanger, professor and chair of Political science Department University of Lethbridge, and PolicyWise with funding from Making the Shift.

The team created Roadmap by engaging over a 100 interest holders in the homelessness sector, including youth with lived experience.

The outcome is a set of recommendations for the homelessness sector.

*Four Recommendations

1. Build quality community engagement
2. Support better data collection and use
3. Support collaboration around prevention
4. Build up data for youth homelessness prevention

*Next Steps:

- **Begin with ongoing data-related initiatives**
 - *"Share the insights from Making the Shift and other projects about youth homelessness prevention"*
- **Next, build new information**
 - *"Start on a smaller scale and build up, starting with a single community or province"*

[*https://policywise.com/a-data-roadmap-for-preventing-youth-homelessness/](https://policywise.com/a-data-roadmap-for-preventing-youth-homelessness/)

3.



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The methods for learning should vary widely and be based on the target research and evaluation questions. In addition, **interest holders discussed a need to move from current ‘pilot-itus’, where projects are regularly funded for short-timelines**, limiting the development of existing strategies and the funding of strong strategies over time.

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The current approach to data infrastructure does not allow you to know the long term impacts of interventions.

Reflection 2: Missed Opportunities to use Data Linkage for Prevention & Collaboration

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Data centres vary in what kind of data is linked, with many gaps in important youth homelessness prevention data across Canada. **To increase the functionality of linked data, more linkage is needed of adult emergency shelter data and early youth cross-systems use data.** This step involves finding available data and working with established data centres to link data.

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Building capacity for data linkage would require the sector to work collaboratively and socialize the costs of data.



3.

Reflection 3: Other Approaches Are Feasible

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Currently, the most advanced data centre in Canada around the roadmap's goals is the **Data Innovation Program in British Columbia** due to its allowance of out-of-province remote access and linkage to homelessness shelter data.

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BC Population is the gold-standard for data linkage in Canada. This points to the fact that an alternative approach is possible in the sector.





Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent does the current data infrastructure enable the aims of the homelessness sector?
2. Who is responsible for ensuring that it does?
3. BC: Why is it different? Why does it matter? Can we replicate it? Should we?



