

Commentary on an approach to Indigenous homelessness

9 March 2020

Indigenous historian and York University professor Jesse Thistle and Dr. Janet Smylie, a Métis family physician and research chair at Unity Health Toronto and the University of Toronto, who are leading the development of a separate guideline specifically to address Indigenous homelessness, co-authored a related commentary in *CMAJ*.

In Canada, Indigenous peoples are eight times more likely to be homeless than non-Indigenous people and make up 10%-80% of the total homeless population in large cities. Indigenous-led approaches are needed to address Indigenous homelessness, and Thistle and Smylie have involved Indigenous elders, researchers and scholars, and people with experiences of homelessness to help develop the guideline.

"Central to Indigenous laws governing relationships is the concept of inter-relationality—the notion that all things, animate and inanimate, are connected. Each Indigenous nation has specific protocols or instructions for behaviour that uphold these laws," the authors write.

Although the guideline development process is not yet complete, Thistle and Smylie have identified four broad protocols for health and social service providers working with Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness: situating one's self, *keeoukaywin* (visiting), hospitality, and treat people as you would treat your own relative.

"Clinical guideline for [homeless](#) and vulnerably housed people, and people with lived homelessness experience" is published March 9, 2020.

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