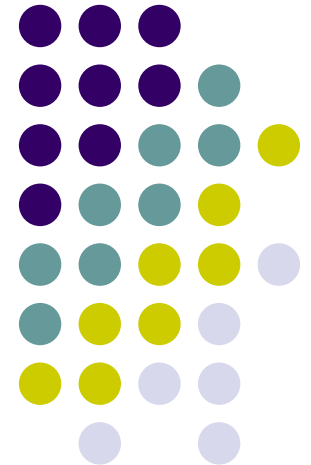


Counting Homelessness

Towards a Consistent Method for Communities

NHRC Homelessness Working Group
November 5, 2008



Outline of presentation



- Background
- Objectives of research
- Methodology
- Findings
- Good practices



Background: the issue

How many people are homeless?

- No mandate to count homelessness
- Some communities undertake counts
- No standardized count method
- Count results are not comparable
- Existing information on homelessness is incomplete



Research objective

To identify good practices for counting homelessness in a consistent way

Methodology



Extensive literature review

Semi-structured interviews with key informants

Limitations

Elements of homeless counts



Time

Point-in-time (snapshot)

Period-prevalence
(longitudinal)

Location

Shelter counts

Service-based counts

Public places counts

- Complete coverage
- Partial coverage

Findings

counting homelessness



- Methodologically challenging
- No one method will generate an accurate result
- Combining methods will achieve more accurate results
- Point-in-time counts are most commonly used

Findings

counting homelessness (cont'd)



- Resource-intensive
- Community support is essential
- Conducting homeless counts provides many benefits to stakeholders

Findings

defining homelessness



- Confusing array of definitions of homelessness in use
- Lack of a consistent definition is a barrier to counting homelessness and to usefulness of count results
- Definitions framework developed in Europe adaptable to Canada

Findings

criteria for count methodology



1. Feasible to undertake

- Geographic location
- Size of community
- Community capacity

Findings

criteria for count methodology



2. Produce results that can be compared or amalgamated between and within communities

Findings

criteria for count methodology



3. Generate reliable and valid estimates of size and nature of homeless population
 - Unduplicated count
 - Consistently applied methodology
 - Completeness of count
 - Definitions of homelessness

Good practice for a consistent methodology



1. Define homelessness in a standardized way:
 - Definitions framework developed by FEANTSA

Good practice for a consistent methodology



2. Combination of point-in-time methods:
 - Overnight shelter count; and
 - Next day service location and public places counts

Good practice for a consistent methodology



3. Include a brief interview component to generate demographic information that is
 - basic
 - self-reported
 - anonymous
 - useful

Good practice for a consistent methodology



4. Acknowledge the inherent limitations of counting homeless individuals:
 - Undercount or low estimate of actual number
 - Results appropriate for identifying *trends* in nature and magnitude of homeless population

Thank you!



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