



Amputations among people experiencing homelessness rise dramatically
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University of Alberta Prof. Damian Collins says the record-breaking rise in amputations among those experiencing homelessness in Alberta can only be solved by creating more social and affordable housing.

The number of frostbite amputations performed in Edmonton last winter was more than the previous three years combined, and more than double any other year over the past decade, according to new data obtained by CBC News. Such amputations occur almost exclusively among people experiencing homelessness.

"These folks are the victims of a housing system that's not working," Damian Collins, a professor and director of the Community Housing node based at the University of Alberta, said in a CBC News article.

While winter in Edmonton was colder than average last year, even colder winters since 2011 saw little or no increase in amputations. But there was a large increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

According to Alberta Health System records, there were 91 frostbite amputations in Edmonton last year, up to four times more than any year since at least 2011, and 65 in Calgary, up from 19 the previous year.

"Housing First works," said Collins. "There's really strong evidence of that."

Housing First is based on the concept that people can address addictions, mental health and other challenges if they have safe, affordable housing, rather than requiring people to deal with their problems before receiving housing.



The approach has been implemented in Alberta, including in Edmonton and Calgary, but it didn't keep up with the increase in homelessness related to the pandemic.

Collins said the problems in Alberta are caused by insufficient government funding for housing given the rapid increase in need and the general unaffordability of market housing.

"We did adopt Housing First and we did fund programs," Collins said. "But we didn't do the other side of the coin, which is build the social and affordable units that are necessary to address the more systematic problems in the housing market."

"The alternative, I guess, is a system that relies on shelters and policing, and that's what we are seeing a lot of in Edmonton right now."

While a Housing First approach would require public spending, Collins said, not providing housing increases other costs like policing, amputations, and other preventable health issues.

For the full CBC article, see: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/frostbite-amputations-hit-10-year-high-in-edmonton-last-winter-new-data-show-1.6709778>