

Report:

National Conference on Ending Homelessness from Oct 28-30, Montreal.

The National Conference on Ending Homelessness was held in Montreal from October 28–30, drawing over 2,300 participants from across Canada. Each day ran from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with keynote speakers, breakout sessions (which were pre-chosen by attendees before the conference), and various learning opportunities. The experience was educational, intense, and at times overwhelming, but valuable. At the end of each day, I was mentally drained.

First Impressions

The conference venue, the Palais des Congress de Montreal (the Montreal Conference center), was very impressive. The main conference room had over 2300 people in attendance and was filled with a diverse group representing every background in Canada, all united by the goal of ending homelessness. The opening ceremony included Indigenous opening remarks, throat singing, drumming, introduction of elders and the lighting of a Sacred Fire, which burned continuously from day 1 to day 3 A smudging space was available throughout the conference. I took part in the smudging with direction from an indigenous leader who offered education on the smudging process and meaning.

Day 1 Sessions

My first session focused on **Collaborative Approaches for Integrated Services**. Presenters from St. John's, Thunder Bay, and Cambridge shared how cross-sector partnerships help deliver wrap-around services. Compared to our region, these programs demonstrated more comprehensive support systems—especially after people are housed. Many programs require participants to engage in responsibilities, life-skills development, and personal planning to maintain stability. This highlighted a gap in our local supports, particularly for Housing First clients who often lose housing quickly after being set up with an apartment.

Speaker: Steven Page

Steven Page shared his personal journey through his own mental health challenges and the importance of community support. His message reinforced the need for stigma reduction and accessible mental-health services, especially for people experiencing homelessness.

Day 2: Simulation Exercise

One standout session that I had chosen and attended was an interactive boardgame simulation. Participants managed limited workers, housing units, and community members needing shelter. Barriers such as staff shortages or housing loss created challenges. After three simulated “years,” of being a silo player, the board came together, and players were part of groups. The groups learned that collaboration reduced the number of people who fell through the cracks. The exercise emphasized the importance of coordinated efforts between services and communities.

Speaker: Loretta Ross

Activist and scholar Loretta Ross spoke about the importance of uniting people—even those with differing opinions—to bring meaningful change. Her story of overcoming addiction and homelessness was powerful and inspiring. Loretta rose above her troubles and became a University professor and author.

Speaker and Funding Announcements

Federal Minister Gregor Robertson spoke on homelessness and announced the first round of Homelessness Reduction Innovation Fund (HRIF) recipients.

Closing Speaker

The conference closed with author Jesse Thistle, who shared six acts of kindness that helped him overcome homelessness and reclaim his identity. His story demonstrated how small acts can contribute to major change.

Take aways from the conference

- Larger cities have stronger coordinated supports, especially in mental health and long-term follow-up.
- Collaboration across sectors is essential to preventing people from returning to homelessness.
- Programs must support not only housing placement but also stability, responsibility, and personal development.

Idea for CBRM improvements

A two-day community workshop:

- **Day 1:** Invite local individuals with lived experience of homelessness. Pay them for their time and expertise, as we would another consultant. During a working lunch, discuss barriers, needs, and possible solutions.
- **Day 2:** Invite families, service providers, and housing partners to collaborate. Discuss barriers and possible solutions with them and compare to what we learned from those who are experiencing homelessness.

This model has been successful in other regions and could be beneficial in generating meaningful local insights.

Conclusion

Attending this conference was enlightening and an eye-opener. It highlighted both the challenges and the innovative work happening across Canada. I am grateful for the opportunity and strongly encourage others to attend in the future—it showed me just how much more there is to learn.