



PROBUS Club of Central Edmonton Newsletter

May 2024

Editor: Ken Hoffman

Website: www.probus-central-edmonton.com

Email: probus.cent.ed@gmail.com

May 21 Dr. Cameron Barr

Dr. Cameron Barr of the Edmonton Inner City Radius Clinic spoke to us about the Edmonton housing and homelessness problem: how it started, how things got so bad, why nothing seems to be working, and what can be done about it. His presentation was full of statistics and other information. I will include some of these in this article.

First, he shared with us the numbers that illustrate the scope of the problem, these are:

- ~3300 homeless people in Edmonton (2023)
- Combination of sleeping rough and staying in shelters
- Incredibly high death rate (fentanyl, exposure, heart disease)
- 302 homeless Edmontonians died last year
- You are more likely to die as one of my patients (1/7 in 3 years) than on the frontlines of the Ukraine War (1/10)

He stated that number continues to grow. With respect to deaths, we heard that reasons include overdose, exposure, and events like heart disease. He pointed out that while some reasons are similar to other Edmontonians, but in the case of the homeless, they die at a younger age.



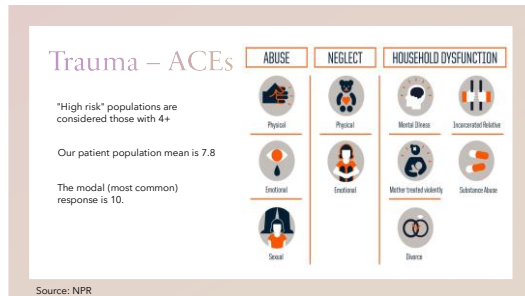
This chart illustrates the change in homeless count. It peaked in 2008, however it started to grow again with the end of the 10 year program to end homelessness. It reached 3,262 in 2024. Thus, we see stark evidence of the problem.

The roots of homelessness are set out under the topics such as income, housing, trauma, and addiction. He explored each of these areas. Income is limited for many of his patients. The income benefits available to people have not kept up with reality. He presented a chart which showed that benefits for "Alberta Works" and other programs all in is just short of \$1,000 a month, while rent for an low cost apartment is almost \$1,300 a month. In large part, the problem is the inadequacy of government programs. Another program known as AISH has better support, but difficult to get on. The second issue is availability of housing that is affordable and/or consistent with the needs of the individual. Housing options include:

- Market housing – limited options, some companies won't rent to social agencies
- The Decline of single room occupancy (SRO) – not up to code!
- Below market rate housing (BMRH) – limited options
- Supportive housing - limited options
- Shelters

- Tents

With respect to BMRH option the stock of some 30,000 units owned by Gov't had the problem of the large of deferred maintenance debt. In response to this problem the Gov't sold off this stock. Lots of his patients need permanent supportive housing, since they cannot take care of themselves. We used to have provincially run facilities which house these people. But, since they were viewed as inhumane, they were closed in 1970's and 80's. The idea being that patients could benefit from community base facilities, but none were built.



We then move on to trauma, this slide was shown to illustrate the tools they use to assess abuse. A high-risk are those people who have over 4 of these indicators. His population of patients mean is 7.8. The most common response is 10. To deal with trauma we need specially trained and affordable psychologists. They are not many available, thus wait times of up to a year. To deal with trauma, people turn to drugs. In general, homeless population addiction rate is 33%. Chronically

homeless have much higher addiction rate.

With respect to treating addiction, a person needs 90 days free to recover from it. However, in Alberta there is limited supply of places for this length of treatment. In fact, most are 28 to 42 days and have long wait times.

He set out questions people ask him some are:

- Who are these people and where do they come from?
 - 69% male
 - 54% indigenous (FNMI)
 - 11.6% youth (under 24)
 - 30-50% homeless youth LGBT
 - 1.1% transgender

Many of them are from northern and outlying communities, also we have correctional institutes which seemingly dump people on the streets after they are released.

- Why don't they get jobs? In my view the answers to this question id a major point of this presentation. Also, appropriate jobs are not available.
- Why don't families take care of them? Many are estranged, Families are the root of trauma, generational poverty and there do not see people whose families do help.
- Why don't they stop using drugs? When your sober you need to deal with you underlying issue. Also, that is not how addiction works.
- Why don't we force people into treatment? Well, there are ethical issues, vehicles exit for doing this, however evidence of effectiveness is mixed, and city lack of capacity.
- Why aren't people staying shelters? They are crowded, noisy, violent, high theft rate, separation from partner, and are to overtly religious.

There is an Alberta homeless response. Unfortunate emphasis on shelters (least useful). Other models exist, such as Housing first. The problem is that we need a range of service options. Along with a significant increase in the available of the various option.

He then reviewed other options that are in place across the world. When you look more closely at these models each have issues. He reviewed Japan, Mississippi, Vienna, and Finland. So, what do we learn from these examples:

- We need an integrated approach!
- More quality social housing, much of which supportive
- Integrated into the urban fabric, not ghettoized
- Massive increase in availability of psychology
- Low-barrier access to addictions treatment
- More rational income supports

He wrapped up with noting that we spend a great deal on homelessness. So, fund will be available, if we reduce homelessness. While fund will not become immediately available, it will. Individually, we can express our views to Gov't. and we can donate.

This presentation provided another on view to the social issues that we heard about in opioid crisis presentation. It was compelling and, yes, depressing. We greatly appreciate the presentation and thank him for it. Also, he is a hero for his efforts.

May 28 - John Janzen Nature Centre



We toured the John Janzen Nature Centre. Perhaps we thought that we knew all about eco-systems. But our guide (Erin) added to our understanding with so many fun facts that we can now chat with the grandkids on an equal footing.

She explained how food drives plants, insects and animals to search at certain periods, sometimes as short as a month. Not only do corvids (such as ravens, crows and magpies) communicate with each other, but so do small mammals and even trees on

occasion. The white birch, when attacked by tent caterpillars, will release adverse chemicals thus alerting adjacent trees.



We examined a collection of 50 ± artifacts, some could be handled while others were small and fragile (and therefore in containers). Animal pelts such as beaver and rabbit were to be expected, but preserved skulls and legs were interesting on account of their variations.

The differing sizes and shapes of teeth in the jaws of carnivores, herbivores and omnivores reflected their respective diets of meat, vegetation and both categories of food.



On the woodland walk, we stopped to hear how the grove of hazelnuts was an important food source and how its pollination process requires two years.

Dual purpose holes were seen in trees (used by birds and squirrels), while rabbit holes could also be used by the elusive western tiger salamander.

We saw how fungi were breaking down dead wood and there was lichen growing on the bark of white birch. It was also interesting that the bark of the white birch turns green because of photosynthesis and that the green deposit can be rubbed on the skin to serve as a very weak sunscreen (SPF 5).



Then it was time to get the skinny on pond life and go dipping. Our samples from the pond turned up snails, beetles, nymphs, water boatmen, tadpoles and many others.

Our group of a dozen or so enjoyed an interesting tour in perfect weather.

If you go with the grandchildren in bad weather there are also age-appropriate displays indoors, which can be seen at:
https://www.edmonton.ca/attractions_events/john_janzen_nature_centre/tegler-discovery-zone
Thank you to Bruce Clark and the “John Jantzen” for an illuminating and age-appropriate tour!

Interesting aside:

Here are some summer-themed dad jokes to brighten your day (From BING Chat):

1. Why don't secrets work at the beach? Because the waves always spill the beans!
2. Why did the scarecrow become a successful politician over the summer? Because he was outstanding in his field!
3. Why do you never want to play hide and seek with the sun? Because it always shines!
4. Why was the sand wet? Because the sea-weed!
5. What did the grape say when it was stepped on at the summer picnic? Nothing, it just let out a little wine!
6. What do you call a sunburnt Santa? Krisp Kringle!
7. What kind of tree fits in your hand? A palm tree!
8. Water you doing, my friend?
9. Glad to ketchup with you.
10. Fishing you a wonderful day.
11. In need of some vitamin sea.
12. Are we good, beaches?
13. I will sea you at the beach.
14. Hey beach! Long time no sea.
15. Whale, hello there, buddy.
16. Tis the sea-sun to be jolly.
17. You used to call me on my shellphone.
18. Come on, friends! Lettuce celebrate.”
19. Hope you have a fintastic day.”
20. Life’s a beach so just enjoy the waves.”

Stay healthy and get your garden is growing