

Title: Uncovering homelessness in Durban: First steps towards supporting street and shelter-living populations

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Theme: Changing Spaces- Towards transforming cities as safe and liveable spaces

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### **Key Components of the research**

- The First census of all persons sleeping on the streets and in formal shelters within the Durban CBD and immediate surrounds totalling 3933 people.
- Provides a profile of street and shelter-living people
- Provides an overview of the survival strategies, current needs and usage of support services by street and shelter-living people
- Through an integrated process, key policy response themes were identified

### **Benefits to the eThekweni Municipality**

- Identification of the various sub-population groups that exists allowing for a more holistic understanding of homelessness
- Evidence base to support and guide interventions
- Highlights key policy related areas requiring further research

### **Expanded summary**

Homelessness is an issue of growing concern in South Africa. While some work has been done exploring the nature of homelessness, there are no comprehensive accounts of the extent of homelessness in Durban, South Africa. In order to support and transform spaces for both street and shelter living populations, it is firstly important to have an understanding of who makes up these populations, the various pathways into homelessness, experiences of homelessness and envisioned ways out of homelessness.

A census and survey of 3933 street and shelter living people was conducted in the central region of Durban in February 2016. The population mainly comprises of males (88% street-living and 80% shelter-living) with a fifth of this population originated from within the province. Most peoples pathways to homelessness start with the search for employment or experiencing some family disagreements or close family death. Experiences of homelessness are characterised by high levels of access to food, limited access to ablution/washing facilities and high levels of violence/intimidation. While many people have managed accessed both healthcare facilities and support services, issues were raised about the quality and effectiveness of such support. Frequent substance use was reported by 60% of the street-living population and 50% of the shelter-living population.

The results reveal the existence of a range of sub-populations and helps in breaking down a number of stereotypes. It is clear that narrow responses will leave many people unserved. Initial policy discussions revealed six areas of policy responses/ intervention namely, public awareness, job creation, support and improvements for shelters, referral/advice centres, law enforcement and targeted services. Each of these themes needs to be further explored based on desired objectives, timelines and available resources.