

## Severe Frostbite among Homeless Albertans

### *Hospitalizations for Severe Frostbite between 2003 and 2014*

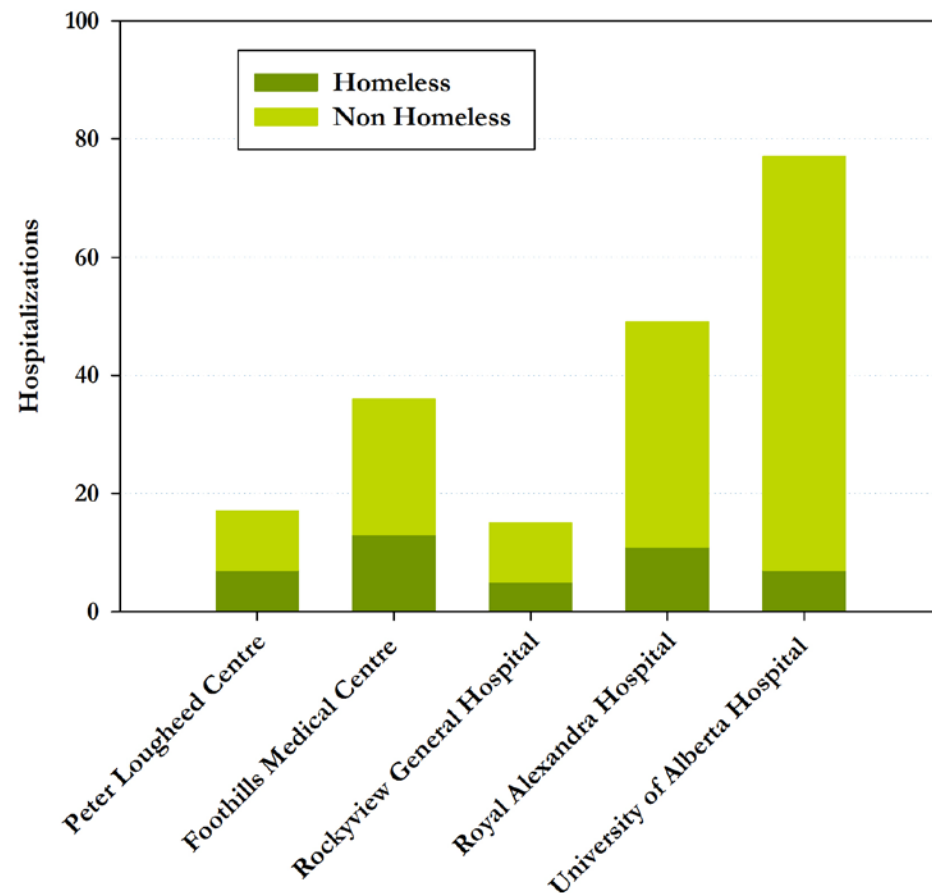
Winter can be excruciatingly painful for the homeless. When external limbs or skin is left exposed in freezing conditions for too long, frostbite may lead to skin necrosis, which is a complication that results in the death of skin tissue. Today's issue of *Health Trends Alberta* examines hospitalization due to severe frostbite with tissue necrosis. Pre-hospital care often involves rewarming of the affected area and addressing it with supportive measures. In rare cases, there could be extensive and irreversible damage making debridement or amputation the only option.

From 2003 to 2014, there were 334 hospital discharges with a primary diagnosis of T34 (Frostbite with tissue necrosis). Among the 334 discharges, 51 (15.3 per cent) were from patients identified as being homeless, which is very high considering the proportion of the Alberta population that was considered homeless in 2006 was estimated to be about 0.25 per cent<sup>1</sup>.

Of the 334 frostbite related hospital discharges, 152 (46 per cent) resulted in an amputation. About 50 per cent of homeless frostbite patients received an amputation, compared to 40 per cent of the non-homeless.

### ***Proportion of Frostbite Hospitalizations among Homeless higher in Calgary Facilities***

Today's graph depicts hospitalizations for 5 facilities in Alberta that account for the majority of homeless frostbite hospitalizations. When examining severe frostbite discharges by facility, the overall numbers of discharges are higher in Edmonton Hospitals. Homeless persons, however, constitute a higher percentage frostbite patients in the Calgary facilities. The homeless represent about 37 per cent frostbite discharges in Calgary compared to 14 per cent in Edmonton facilities.



1. <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/homelessness/14602.html>