

'We're everywhere now': Meet the homeless in Canada's largest city

'It's people who have fallen on hard times, got divorced, lost their jobs, got a work injury'

[Nick Purdon & Leonardo Palleja](#) · CBC News ·

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Frenchie, 28, lives under a bridge near downtown Toronto. He says he isn't worried about surviving the winter - it's the rats that come around at night that scare him. (Nick Purdon/CBC)

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In a given year, 235,000 [Canadians experience homelessness](#).

That's a population the size of a small city.

In Toronto, activists say there have never been so many people without a place to call their own. They use the word "epidemic."

According to the [Toronto Homeless Memorial Network](#), a group that tracks deaths among the homeless, 17 have died in Toronto since the beginning of October 2019.

The thing is, when people talk about the homeless it's often in terms of numbers and statistics like the ones above — but the issue really hits home when you meet the people.

The National's Leonardo Palleja and Nick Purdon spent time with a number of homeless people in Toronto. Here are some of their stories:

Frenchie



Frenchie is 28 years old and has been living under this bridge in Toronto for the past six months. He says the people he meets 'above ground' judge him because he's homeless. (Nick Purdon/CBC)

For six months, Frenchie (he says that's what his friends call him) has slept in a tent under a bridge in Toronto — a few blocks from some of the most expensive houses in the country.

Frenchie says he lost his restaurant job and had some bad luck, and after that things went downhill.

"It's a difficult life, but we survive. Every day we survive," he says.

There are about 15 other people living in the makeshift camp under the bridge, a small community where he says he's treated well. Above ground, on the street, he says people judge him.

We have a different life, but we are still human — we are not alien, we are still people.-
Frenchie

"I just want to say to people, we are not that bad," he says. "We have a different life, but we are still human — we are not alien, we are still people."

It's hard to know exactly how many Canadians sleep outside on a given night, but [the best estimate is around 35,000 individuals](#).

Frenchie says he doesn't worry that much about winter — he has plenty of tarps and blankets, and sometimes he lights a small fire in his tent to keep warm.

Read full story:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/homeless-in-toronto-1.5400781>