

Kíkinanaw Óma

This is Our Home Here

A STRATEGY TO SUPPORT UNSHELTERED WINNIPEGGERS



End Homelessness Winnipeg
JUNE 2020



Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2

CONTEXT: Unsheltered Homelessness in Canada 3

INTERIM STRATEGY: Call Diversion and Community Connection.....10

OUTREACH STRATEGY: Coordination and Communication12

SAFETY STRATEGY: Risk Mitigation, Evacuations, and COVID-1914

MEDIA STRATEGY: Addressing Stigma and Shifting Paradigms18

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH: Engagement and Relocation20

RECOMMENDATIONS.....22

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....25

Appendix A: Principles for Shared Language and Messaging25

Appendix B: Terms of Reference - adopted October 15, 2019 1

Appendix C: Media Toolkit – Reporting on Homelessness..... 4

Appendix D: What to Do – Guide for Residents..... 8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Winnipeg is experiencing an escalating housing emergency. Temporary encampments and unsheltered homelessness are the most visible symptoms of the crisis. People living unsheltered and in encampments endure a daily violation of their human right to housing.¹

This emergency has reached a critical juncture. Hundreds of people in our city face a daily reality that places them at increased risk of violence, exploitation and personal injury. These harms are worsened by systemic injustices: colonialism, racism, ableism and other oppressions. Coping strategies individuals adopt to relieve suffering and precarity place them at increased risk of harms related to substance use, sexual activity or involvement with the criminal justice system. The COVID-19 pandemic, which closed many services people experiencing unsheltered homelessness relied on for food, hygiene and community, deepened the risks people experiencing unsheltered homelessness face.

It is the responsibility of all levels of government to help ensure individuals' basic human rights are met, so that all are able to live in a manner that offers security, peace and dignity. All citizens have roles to play in holding governments accountable to these human rights obligations. Citizens also have a role to play in connecting fellow residents who are experiencing homelessness with supports needed for claiming the right to housing.

Over the past year, *Kíkininaw Óma: the Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers* has engaged with first responders, City of Winnipeg officials, community agencies and people with lived experience of homelessness, to work collaboratively on interim responses and longer-term strategies that can connect individuals who are unsheltered with our community, to advance their right to housing.

To date, the group has implemented a procedure that redirects calls to 311 or Winnipeg Police Service, so that trained peer and outreach workers from Main Street Project, rather than police officers, are the first line of response to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The group has developed and implemented communications strategies to help inform public discourse on homelessness in Winnipeg, shifting the needle on stigmatizing stereotypes toward a rights-based lens. The group has also adopted a rights-based approach, informed by *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada*,² to shape interim and long-term responses in ways that can better uphold and protect the human rights of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Interim responses and public awareness measures cannot ultimately solve the crisis Winnipeg is facing. For this reason, the recommendations of this Strategy call for all levels of government to act now on creating housing. Winnipeg urgently requires additional low-income, low-barrier and supportive housing options: an investment which all levels of government, including Indigenous governments, and the private and philanthropic sectors must work together to achieve.

¹ "The Right to Adequate Housing Toolkit," accessed June 2020:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/toolkit/pages/righttoadequatehousingtoolkit.aspx>

² "A National Protocol on Homeless Encampments in Canada," accessed June 2020: <https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf>

CONTEXT: Unsheltered Homelessness in Canada

According to the *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*, homelessness is defined as “the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.”³

Homelessness can be described through a range of situations:

- **Unsheltered:** Sleeping outside in tents, bus shelters, cars, doorways, or in empty buildings
- **Emergency Sheltered:** Staying in emergency shelters for adults, youth or family violence
- **Provisionally Accommodated:** Staying in transitional housing, hotels, motels, hostels, jails, hospitals, or “couch surfing” with family or friends, without a long-term agreement or plan.
- **At Risk:** Living in housing that is too expensive, crowded or unsafe⁴

In Canada, on a single night in 2018, at least 32,005 people were experiencing homelessness.⁵ In Winnipeg, on a single night in 2018, at least 1,519 people were experiencing homelessness (Table 1).⁶

Table 1: Winnipeg Street Census 2018⁷

The 2018 Street Census reached 1,519 people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg. On that night, they were staying in the following locations:	
Unsheltered	204
Emergency Sheltered	392
Provisionally accommodated	895
Location unknown	28

Jesse Thistle’s *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* identifies it as the outcome of historical and ongoing settler colonization and racism, that has displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories.⁸ This definition highlights 12 dimensions of the experience, which can include Historic Displacement, Contemporary Geographic Separation, Spiritual Disconnection, Cultural Disintegration and Loss, Overcrowding, Relocation and Mobility, and other experiences.⁹

³ “Canadian Definition of Homelessness,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Everyone Counts 2018: Highlights - Report,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/reports/highlights-2018-point-in-time-count.html>

⁶ “Winnipeg Street Census 2018 Final Report,” accessed June 2020: http://streetcensuswpg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018_FinalReport_Web.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>

⁹ “The 12 Dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness as articulated by Indigenous Peoples across Canada,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>

Homelessness must “be understood in the context of historical and ongoing structural racism and colonization in Canada, whereby Indigenous peoples have been systemically discriminated against and dispossessed of their lands, properties, and legal systems.”¹⁰ In Canada, reserve and scrip systems, forced migrations, residential schools, Sixties Scoop and CFS policies have led to Indigenous peoples’ experiences of homelessness.¹¹

Indigenous people in Winnipeg experience rates of homelessness between five and six times that of the general population, and rates of poverty twice that of the general population. At least two-thirds (66-71%) of those experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg identify as Indigenous, with the majority (80%) identifying as First Nations.¹² One quarter of Indigenous adults and more than one third of Indigenous children in Winnipeg live in poverty.¹³ Across Canada, close to 30% of those experiencing homelessness identify as Indigenous, while Indigenous people represent less than 5% of the Canadian population.¹⁴

People experiencing homelessness face much higher rates of disability, injury and many other health concerns. *The Center for Justice and Social Compassion* has estimated that 45% of all people experiencing homelessness live with disabilities, including mental illness, compared to 13.2% of Canada’s general population.¹⁵ A Toronto study found that 53% of individuals experiencing homelessness had experienced a traumatic brain injury.¹⁶

The *2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report* found that approximately half of participants experiencing homelessness were usually in pain. The most often mentioned conditions included: arthritis or joint problems (52%); migraines (37%); environmental allergies (34%); problems walking or another physical handicap (34%); and hearing problems (24%). When asked about mental health, many identified experiencing serious depression (72%) and anxiety (73%), while almost half (49.9%) reported serious thoughts of hurting themselves or suicide. In addition, almost half (48%) indicated they had been physically assaulted in the past year.

¹⁰ “A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf>

¹¹ “End Homelessness Winnipeg Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur report on the Right to adequate Housing for Indigenous Peoples,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/IndigenousPeoples/CSO/End%20Homelessness%20Winnipeg%20Canada.pdf>

¹² “Winnipeg Street Census 2018;” “2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report,” accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018-Winnipeg-Street-Health-Survey-Final-Report.pdf>.

¹³ “Poverty in Winnipeg By the Numbers,” accessed June 2020: <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=17817&SectionId=&InitUrl>

¹⁴ “Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census: Aboriginal peoples,” accessed June 2020: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-CAN-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=9>

¹⁵ “People with Disabilities,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/population-specific/people-disabilities>

¹⁶ “Traumatic Brain Injury in the Homeless Population: A Toronto Study,” accessed June 2020: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/26-traumatic-brain-injury-homeless-population-toronto-study>

These statistics reveal the challenging, and often co-occurring, issues that many people experiencing homelessness encounter and manage on a regular basis.¹⁷

Homelessness is a direct outcome of a housing affordability crisis. The top barriers to finding and maintaining housing identified by people experiencing homelessness in the **2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report** were that 'rent is too high' (77%) and there is 'a lack of suitable housing' (75%).¹⁸ In Winnipeg, 64,065 households are living in housing that is unaffordable, meaning they are paying more than 30% of their income for housing. Renters are at a higher disadvantage, with 39.5% in unaffordable housing compared to 12% of owners.¹⁹ 10,560 renters are severely rent burdened, paying more than 50% of their income on rent.²⁰

Core housing need is a metric describing households that are living in housing that is unaffordable, in need of major repairs, or unsuitable for their household composition. 12% of Winnipeggers (35,760 households), are in core housing need.²¹ For Indigenous households, the rate is almost double, with 22% (8,265 households) in core housing need.²²

These are troubling statistics, particularly when the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in thousands of Manitobans losing their jobs.²³ In 2016, 42% (40,500) of working households in Manitoba had less than one month's worth of savings, while 23,500 households had less than one week.²⁴ This means, as emergency benefits run out and eviction bans are lifted, many more individuals and families may find themselves experiencing homelessness for the first time. Access to affordable, but also safe, culturally-relevant, and suitable housing, is critically important.

Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) is Manitoba's social welfare program. More than half of those interviewed for the 2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey (55.2%) reported receiving EIA.²⁵ EIA includes a rental benefit (Rent Assist), and while this program is essential to support individuals and families maintaining housing, the amount is capped (at 75% Median Market Rent), meaning that many still cannot afford housing and may find themselves experiencing homelessness.

¹⁷ "2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018-Winnipeg-Street-Health-Survey-Final-Report.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Winnipeg and Manitoba Housing Data – 2018," accessed June 2020: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2019/03/Housing%20Data%202018_03.23.2019.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Core housing need," accessed June 2020: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/households-menage037-eng.cfm>

²² "Winnipeg and Manitoba Housing Data - 2018"

²³ "Manitoba's unemployment doubles in two months amid COVID-19," accessed June 2020: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6923513/manitoba-unemployment-doubles-coronavirus/>

²⁴ "The Rent is Due Soon," accessed June 2020: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/2020/03/Rent%20is%20due%20soon%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁵ "2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report"

Housing is affordable when a household can spend 30% or less of their income on housing. A single person receiving EIA renting an average bachelor apartment in Winnipeg would need to spend 87% of their income on housing. Those in the Disability benefit category of EIA would need to spend 68% of their income on housing.²⁶ Meanwhile, rental stock has been decreasing, and rents rising.²⁷

Social housing (or public/community housing) is often rent-geared-to-income, ensuring affordability. As of December 2019, there were 7,000 households on the wait-list for Manitoba Housing, the largest provider of social housing across the province.²⁸ By the end of March 2020, the number was roughly 9,000.²⁹

Emergency shelters are available to individuals experiencing homelessness. In Winnipeg, there are approximately 519 emergency shelter beds available for individuals, youth, and families.³⁰ Most offer overnight stays in congregate sleeping settings on mats, cots or bunks. Shelters play a critical role in offering an emergency response for those without a home. However, people may experience barriers to accessing shelters or choose not to go. Barriers may include shelters being at capacity; having restrictions on pets, belongings or alcohol; separating couples; or requiring detailed intake criteria or processes. People may choose not to go to a shelter because they do not feel safe due to crowdedness, noise, past experiences of violence, previous negative experiences at shelters, perceived health or safety risks, accessibility concerns, stigma or shame.³¹

Emergency shelters cannot serve everyone's needs.³² For this reason, people may feel "forced to choose between 'sleeping rough' on their own (putting themselves at risk of violence and criminalization), entering an emergency homeless shelter (which may be inaccessible or inappropriate for their needs, or in which their autonomy, dignity, self-reliance, and/or independence may be undermined), or residing in a homeless encampment (in which they may lack access to basic services and face threats to their health)."³³

²⁶ "Winnipeg and Manitoba Housing Data – 2018"

²⁷ "Private Rental Housing Market Inventory Report," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Private-Rental-Market-Housing-Inventory-Report.pdf>.

²⁸ "Taking (private) stock: Manitoba's social housing plans follow failed examples," accessed June 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/opinion-manitoba-social-housing-kirsten-bernas-1.5387318>.

²⁹ "Privatization of MB Housing concerning for advocates," accessed June 2020: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/privatization-of-mb-housing-concerning-for-advocates-568954812.html>

³⁰ "Shelter Capacity Report 2018," accessed June 2020: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/publications-bulletins/shelter-capacity-2018.html>.

³¹ "Unsheltered Homelessness: Trends, Causes, and Strategies to Address," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/unsheltered-brief-final-7.26.pdf>

³² "Main Street Project secures temporary funding for drop-in warming centre," accessed June 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/main-street-project-warming-centre-funding-temporary-1.5432687>

³³ "A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada"

Housing First programs, as well as transitional and temporary housing, may be available as other options for individuals experiencing homelessness. Limited affordable and safe rental supply presents a barrier for Housing First programs, which are often at capacity in Winnipeg since individuals cannot 'graduate out' to cover their rent due to lack of available income. Transitional and temporary housing programs, while offering a vital bridge to stable housing for many participants, are not permanent.

Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments

People experiencing unsheltered homelessness may live in encampments, where one or more people are 'sleeping rough,' using tents or constructing other temporary structures.³⁴ Encampments can occur in parks and along roadways, or in less visible settings in forests or along riverbanks. Individuals or groups may also stay unsheltered in other settings, such as vehicles or boarded-up buildings. While unsheltered homelessness and encampments are perhaps the most visible form of homelessness, there is relatively limited data on the demographics of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, their reasons for sleeping unsheltered or in encampments, or best practices in responding to and supporting people living in encampments.³⁵

In Canada, on a single night in 2018, 14% (4,480 people) of those experiencing homelessness were unsheltered. In Winnipeg, on a single night in 2018, 13% (204 people) of those experiencing homelessness were unsheltered. Approximately 65% identified as male, 31% female and 4% non-binary.

Indigenous people are even more over-represented in unsheltered populations than in homelessness overall, representing 79% of those in the 2018 Winnipeg Street Census.³⁶ By contrast, comparatively few Indigenous people stayed at emergency, youth or domestic violence shelters. A majority of emergency shelter users identified in the Winnipeg Street Census 2018 were non-Indigenous, despite comprising just over 1/3 of the overall population in the survey. While this still means Indigenous people are over-represented in the emergency shelter population, it raises questions regarding emergency shelter use among Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. Some national research suggests that Indigenous people experiencing homelessness may have high episodic use of shelters, which may speak to a need for more low-barrier and culturally appropriate shelter and housing options.³⁷

A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada suggests that this may be tied to "negative or harmful interactions with colonial institutions, such as residential schools, the child welfare system, corrections, hospitals, asylums or sanitoriums, and shelters [which] may be intergenerational in nature and highly traumatic. For these reasons and others, Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in homeless populations across Canada, and further to this, are more likely to be part of 'outdoor' or 'unsheltered' populations – including homeless encampments."³⁸

³⁴ "A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada"

³⁵ "Unsheltered Homelessness: Trends, Causes, and Strategies to Address,"

³⁶ "Winnipeg Street Census 2018 Final Report"

³⁷ "The use of homeless shelters by Indigenous peoples in Canada," accessed June 2020: <https://nickfalvo.ca/the-use-of-homeless-shelters-by-indigenous-peoples-in-canada/>

³⁸ "A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada"

While there is limited data on best practices in responding to and supporting people living in encampments, *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada* notes that in Canada, governments have typically left engagement with encampments to city officials, who receive little, if any, guidance and support. As a result, municipal authorities are often unaware of their legal obligations under international human rights law, leading to a pattern whereby bylaws, police, and zoning policies are deployed to displace people in encampments, sometimes through forcible evictions that can involve arrests and destruction of individuals' belongings.³⁹

Recent research from the United States has identified four types of responses to encampments:

- Clearance with Little or No Support: sweeps with little advance notice and limited referrals to shelter or service
- Clearance with Support: notice provided in advance, often by trained outreach workers; storage of items provided, as well as referrals to shelters and services
- Tacit Acceptance: encampments are allowed to persist, supported by outreach workers and basic infrastructure like portable toilets, showers and drinking water
- Formal Sanctioning: encampments permitted by law or ordinance in designated locations, with sanitation infrastructure and connections to services⁴⁰

This research suggests that there is little evidence for the effectiveness of any of these strategies, in terms of supporting individuals living in encampments to secure longer-term housing. Researchers note that none of these responses are a solution to unsheltered homelessness or encampments, and that "cities will need to invest in permanent solutions, such as housing that is affordable to extremely low-income people, permanent supportive housing, mental health services, affordable healthcare, and perhaps also supervised drug consumption sites and low-barrier employment opportunities."⁴¹

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has urged caution against formal sanctioning of encampments, on the basis that they have little impact on reducing homelessness, and can be costly in terms of resources that could be better invested in longer-term solutions such as low-income, low-barrier and supportive housing options.⁴² An international evidence review, completed in 2017, echoes the call for permanent housing options for people who are sleeping unsheltered or in encampments, emphasizing the effectiveness of the Housing First model for reducing unsheltered homelessness.⁴³

³⁹ "A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada"

⁴⁰ "Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses: Emerging Evidence as of Late 2018," accessed June 2020:
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Understanding-Encampments.pdf>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Caution is Needed When Considering 'Sanctioned Encampments,'" accessed June 2020:
https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Caution_Sanctioned_Encampments_Safe_Zones_052318.pdf

⁴³ "Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review," accessed June 2020:
https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238368/ending_rough_sleeping_what_works_2017.pdf

BACKGROUND: How this Strategy was Created

In May 2019, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued by the City of Winnipeg for “collection and disposal of bulky waste found in temporary homeless shelters.”⁴⁴ The RFP received significant attention from local media and community members, sparking wider discussions on community perceptions of homelessness and on the right to housing.

On June 6, End Homelessness Winnipeg facilitated a gathering of community stakeholders to share ideas on how to support people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg. Participants highlighted the important work of local street outreach teams, and identified a number of opportunities, including:

- Working with the City to redirect concerns regarding encampments to outreach workers
- Educating people on the realities experienced by those living unsheltered
- Increasing access to a range of low-income housing options, including accessible housing, low-barrier supportive housing, social housing, and more

In late June, the City of Winnipeg cancelled the RFP and committed to working with community stakeholders and people with lived experience to develop a strategy for addressing unsheltered homelessness and encampments. End Homelessness Winnipeg convened with community stakeholders and City of Winnipeg staff, including representatives from Corporate Services, Public Works, and Winnipeg Police Service, to establish an interim strategy for engaging with temporary encampments. City of Winnipeg staff requested a single point of contact for connecting calls made to 311 or police with appropriate outreach services. Main Street Project proposed to be this first point of contact. All agreed that police should be called in emergencies only, rather than as a first point of contact for those who are unsheltered. The group began to meet regularly to monitor the implementation of this interim strategy and to identify longer-term solutions. The group set the following shared goals:

- Connect those who are unsheltered with our communities
- Educate, train, and speak out against stigma
- Develop a shared understanding and work through a lens of harm reduction

In August, the group established principles for shared messaging (Appendix A) and in October, Terms of Reference were adopted (Appendix B). By December, it was identified that enhanced street outreach services, 24-7 safe spaces and housing would be key components of a long-term, strategic response to support individuals who are unsheltered. In January 2020, the group agreed to a rights-based approach, using the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing’s report on informal settlements as a framework.⁴⁵ Elder Belinda Vandebroek gifted the group the name *Kíkininaw Óma*, which can be translated from Cree as “this is our home here.” Over the following months, this strategy was completed, while the COVID-19 pandemic presented new challenges for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg.

⁴⁴ “RFP NO. 1113-2018,” accessed April 2020:

[https://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/findata/matmgt/documents//2018/1113-2018//1113-2018-Request for Proposal.pdf](https://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/findata/matmgt/documents//2018/1113-2018//1113-2018-Request%20for%20Proposal.pdf)

⁴⁵ “2018 Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context,” accessed April 2020: <https://www.undocs.org/A/73/310/Rev.1>

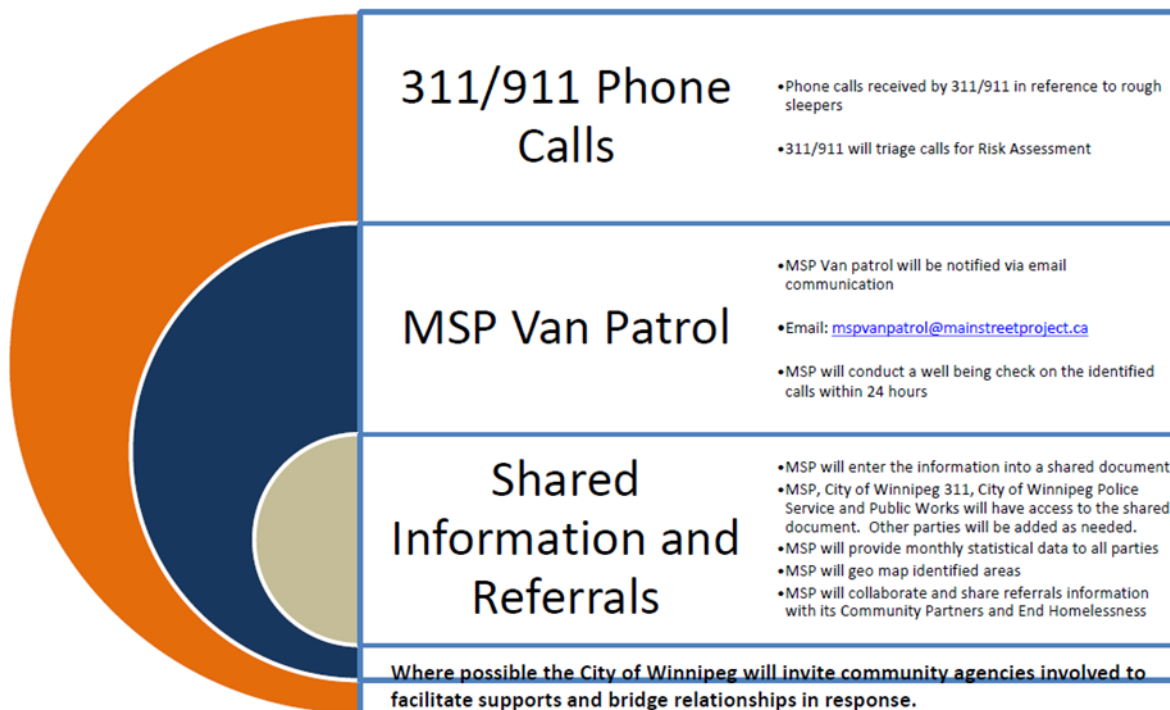
INTERIM STRATEGY: Call Diversion and Community Connection

Concerned Winnipeg residents who encounter an encampment or an individual sleeping unsheltered will sometimes call 311, police non-emergency, or 911. In some cases, residents are concerned for the wellness of the individual or group. In other cases, residents are concerned by the visibility of homelessness in their neighbourhoods and simply want the area vacated.

Prior to the development of the interim strategy, these requests were diverted either to Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) to perform wellness checks or ask individuals to move, or to City of Winnipeg Public Works to remove materials left behind by an abandoned encampment.

As of June 2019, this response has changed to implement a more person-centred approach. Calls that do not indicate an immediate threat to personal or public safety are now diverted to Main Street Project. Main Street Project peer and outreach workers attend the locations identified in the calls, to assess the situation and connect individuals with appropriate supports and services in the community. Emergency calls continue to be directed to 911, so that appropriate first responders can attend. (Figure 1)⁴⁶

Figure 1: Interim Call Diversion Strategy Process Map



Residents calling 311 are alerted to how their call will be followed up on. Callers are also assured that unsheltered individuals will be connected to appropriate supports. Previously, callers would generally be told that police would visit the location, to ask unsheltered individuals to vacate the area. This change in scripting and process provides an opportunity to educate callers, destigmatize poverty and homelessness, and affirm that those who are unsheltered remain important community members and part of our city.

⁴⁶ Created by Main Street Project, Summer 2019

Calls to 911 are further assessed. Those that are deemed to present no immediate safety concern are directed to Winnipeg Police Service Community Support Units rather than Patrols. The mandate of Community Support Units is to proactively identify problems at the community level, by liaising and interacting with community organizations, residents, and local businesses.⁴⁷ Community Support Units notify Main Street Project of non-emergent 911 calls regarding encampments. Where safety risks are evident but there is not a safety emergency, Main Street Project works in collaboration with Community Support Units and the City to attend encampment locations. When serious or ongoing safety risks are identified, the City engages Main Street Project peer and outreach workers to:

- Notify residents that they must relocate and inform them of the timeline for clearing the area
- Engage with them on alternate sheltering options as well as transportation or storage needs

Once a site is vacated in response to a change of location or safety hazards, City of Winnipeg Public Works crews attend, with assistance from Winnipeg Police Service Community Support Units and Main Street Project staff, to dispose of any unwanted items left behind.

In addition to the process and scripting changes, City of Winnipeg staff have been educated on homelessness and directed to integrate a person-centred approach to interactions with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and with members of the public enquiring about homelessness and the City's efforts. Information on the interim strategy and a rights-based approach to unsheltered homelessness has been presented to workers in the Public Works Department and is now part of onboarding training and the staff orientation handbook.

Outreach workers have identified that this interim response gives people experiencing unsheltered homelessness or living in encampments a greater sense of safety. Rather than police showing up, peer advocates and outreach workers check on people, working to build trust and compassion, and offering alternatives that can support a pathway to housing.

Since the interim response has been implemented, there has been a decrease in 911 calls related to encampments, as well as Winnipeg Police Services dispatches to encampments.⁴⁸

This interim strategy has been facilitated through a shared online document that allows all parties to check in on locations and ensure any necessary follow up had occurred. Main Street Project also reports monthly to 311 directly on contacts that have taken place in response to calls made to 311. Strategies remain to be developed for closing communication and notification loops once information is received; for actioning and noting outcomes; and for a formalized process of referrals and engagement to other outreach services and community supports. Moving forward, a more robust shared information system may be needed, as the shared document has become a challenge to update, share, streamline and maintain over time. Defining shared indicators and data collection points could also better demonstrate the impact of this interim strategy moving forward.

⁴⁷ "Policing in Winnipeg: An Operational Review," accessed June 2020: <https://curtgriffiths.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/WPS-operational-review.pdf>

⁴⁸ "20190820 Supporting Unsheltered Winnipeggers Meeting Minutes," End Homelessness Winnipeg; follow-up conversations with Community Support Sergeants.

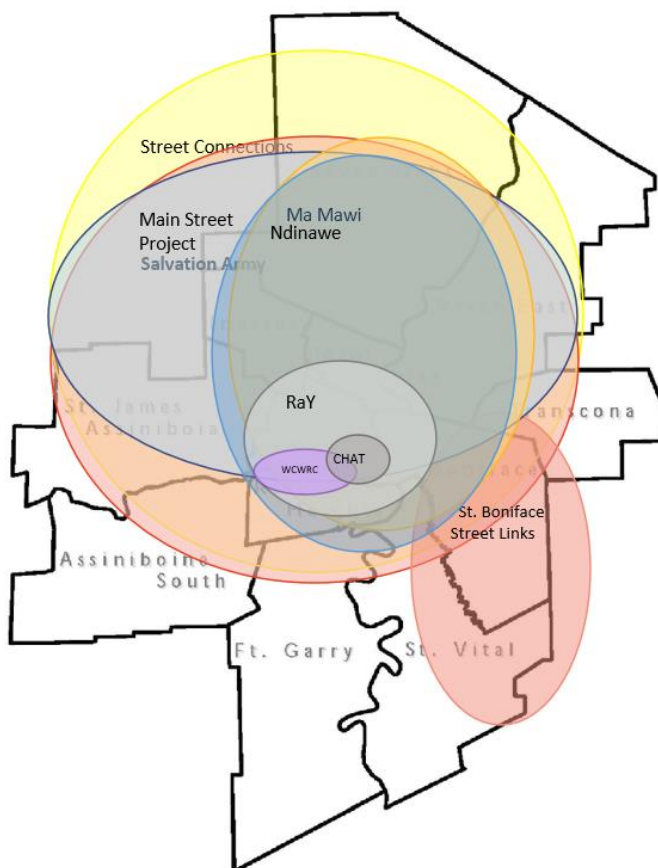
OUTREACH STRATEGY: Coordination and Communication

Across Winnipeg, there are at least 12 community agencies engaged in street outreach, working with different populations, different geographic areas, or offering different services.⁴⁹ These groups connect with people who are sleeping unsheltered or street involved, to offer support, supplies, resources and connection.

Many of these groups connect regularly through engagement tables such as the Winnipeg Outreach Network (WON), or the Outreach Services Working Group established in response to COVID-19. These tables provide a space for direct service street outreach workers to connect and problem-solve collaboratively.

Together, street outreach providers strive to provide 24/7 coverage across the city, with a focus on high-need, densely populated areas in the city's core. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Outreach Van Coverage Map, June 2020



Lack of funding for adequate staffing, as well as absence of a robust information-sharing platform, limit coordination among providers. Many agencies operate on tight budgets with a small number of staff. One staff person getting sick can mean a whole team is off the road, while shifts are juggled. Such challenges became increasingly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The variety of groups, their different services or target populations, limited information sharing infrastructure, and changing schedules can make it confusing for Winnipeggers to know who to call. It can also result in duplication of services, or gaps in support for people in need. For example, one outreach team may visit an encampment offering water and sandwiches, and then 30 minutes later a different team could offer the same. Alternatively, days could go by where no one might check in on an individual or encampment.

Outreach workers have identified that people who are unsheltered can be annoyed by multiple groups visiting them on the same day, offering the same supports, and not

⁴⁹ "Extreme Cold Weather: Where to go and who to call," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Warming-shelters-and-outreach-20200116.pdf>

communicating with each other. Increased staffing and financial resources for the teams, along with a more coordinated approach, is needed.

The interim strategy provided one opportunity to test a coordinated and triaged approach to outreach. Main Street Project outreach was identified as the first point of contact for people who are unsheltered or in encampments, as it operates 365 days per year, including overnight. Main Street Project could then connect to other outreach agencies for specialized supports for youth, women experiencing violence, or others. However, without coordinated communication or referral pathways, closing the communication loop and making connections to other supports or outreach teams remains a challenge.

In the winter of 2019-2020, many groups that are part of the Winnipeg Outreach Network (WON) began testing communication programs like texting and walkie talkie apps and exploring a shared database. These types of measures can facilitate communication, alerting teams of safety issues or spots in need of wellness checks or supplies. As of Spring 2020, many groups are being added to the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS): a shared information platform for the homeless-serving sector. This will allow groups to better communicate, share information and data, and facilitate better coordination of coverage, thereby minimizing service duplication and gaps, and using limited resources more efficiently. It will also support a connection between street outreach teams and a Coordinated Access system for housing, enabling outreach teams to move beyond meeting immediate basic needs and sharing information on their respective agencies, to being able to connect individuals with longer-term options for housing supports. Connecting unsheltered individuals to community supports and services is a critical component of outreach, and for the Kíkinaw Óma strategy.

Some individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness or living in encampments just want to be left alone and are not interested in supports or services. This could be tied to negative interactions with colonial institutions as mentioned previously. These individuals and their choices must be respected, while relationships of trust and connection must also be established to help ensure they are not left isolated or in extreme danger.

Other individuals may be interested in accessing supports, but having outreach workers arrive at the right time, when the individuals might be interested and able to access an intake appointment, can be challenging. Services often run on a 9-5 schedule, while people's lives – particularly if they are unsheltered – do not always follow that schedule. The lack of person-centred services with flexible hours and points of access can result in missed appointments, frustrations, and loss of interest in supports. There is a shortage of 24/7 safe spaces for a variety of high-need priority groups, including youth, women and 2SLGBTQ people.⁵⁰ Access to appropriate supports is further challenged by the fact that Winnipeg has no safe consumption sites⁵¹ or managed alcohol programs⁵² to reduce harms for people who are unsheltered and use alcohol or drugs.

⁵⁰ "24/7 Safe Spaces in Winnipeg: A Brief Review of Existing Reports & Services," <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-24-7-Safe-Spaces-Redacted.pdf>

⁵¹ "Safe Consumption Spaces," Accessed May 2020 https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/d8ced8_c6b3562078c44f4da112636ca60cbbbf.pdf.

⁵² "Managed Alcohol Programs in Manitoba: Feasibility Report," https://static.wixstatic.com/ugd/d8ced8_38aa716110404c3b9118a7d037714d99.pdf.

Access to safe, affordable, culturally-appropriate housing remains the most critical gap for supporting unsheltered Winnipeggers. This challenge is related to both the lack of appropriate housing supply and the lack of sufficient income supports.

Winnipeg is home to only two supportive housing buildings:⁵³ the Bell Hotel and the Madison. Housing First agencies, who will support placement into any type of appropriate housing, consistently identify lack of safe, supportive, affordable, and culturally-appropriate units as a barrier.

Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) is one option available to provide income for those who are unable to secure work. While this is a necessary support and resource, there can be a variety of barriers to accessing and retaining EIA. Most EIA intake happens through appointments during office hours, although emergency assistance is available at other times. There can be long wait times to begin receiving assistance, and this schedule may not always line up with when an apartment is available. Once a person receives EIA, they need to make and keep regular appointments and be available by phone. Many people experiencing unsheltered homelessness do not have regular access to a phone, or a number where someone can leave a message. 30% of participants in the 2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey said that their EIA benefits had been discontinued within the last year, without them having any other source of income.⁵⁴ These challenges can make it very difficult to access the income required to secure housing. EIA has been actively engaged in the Kíkininaw Óma strategy group, discussing ways of improving access to intake and housing for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

SAFETY STRATEGY: Risk Mitigation, Evacuations, and COVID-19

While protecting the lives of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness was not articulated as a goal or shared principle of the strategy group, it quickly became evident that this was the fundamental priority for every participant.

By the fall of 2019, Winnipeg's harsh climate escalated concerns for the life safety of people taking shelter in bus shacks, abandoned buildings and encampments. As weather turns colder each year, many people seek warmth by layering materials on tents and shelters or by entering empty or boarded-up buildings. People use candles, fuel-based heaters or fires to stay warm, heightening safety risks. Vacant buildings catch fire at a high rate compared with other jurisdictions. Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service (FPS) recorded at least 34 significant fires in vacant buildings in 2019, including boarded-up houses and apartment blocks.⁵⁵

In October 2019, a fire broke out at an encampment underneath the Osborne Street Bridge, destroying shelters and causing smoke damage. Ten days later, a major storm brought heavy snow and high winds. By the end of the month, warmer temperatures caused water levels to rise, threatening the lives of those encamped along riverbanks.⁵⁶

⁵³ Note: there is no agreed upon definition in Manitoba around 'supportive housing.' Other transitional and/or recovery housing could be considered a part of supportive housing.

⁵⁴ "2018 Street Health Survey."

⁵⁵ Conversation with FPS, May 2020

⁵⁶ "Moving homeless camps flooded by October snowstorm," CTV. Accessed April 2020: <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1812999&binId=1.1164782&playlistPageNum=1>

By November, at least a dozen residents who had been living under the Osborne Street Bridge moved into transitional housing, supported by Main Street Project.⁵⁷ Others persevered at the location until December 12, when the encampment was evacuated due to exposed live electrical wires that posed risks of electrocution and fire.

This series of events highlighted the need for FPS to be engaged as a key partner in responding to issues of life safety for those living unsheltered and in encampments. FPS began to participate in the strategy group in November 2019.

Later that month, two plywood structures were deposited at an encampment near the Disraeli Bridge. Encampment residents told outreach workers and Community Support officers that the structures had been placed without their consultation or consent. The structures were windowless and uninsulated, presenting fire and life safety risks as well as liability concerns. Winnipeg Police Service identified that they had to be removed.⁵⁸

In December, community activists erected a teepee, donated by the Indigenous Family Centre, at another nearby encampment. A call was circulated through social media for donations of firewood and supplies. A City of Winnipeg spokesperson confirmed that the teepee would not be taken down, due to the "sacred nature of the structure and ceremonial significance of activities within it."⁵⁹

One week later, a second teepee was raised nearby, through a collaboration between local men's support groups Healing Together and Ojijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK). The second teepee was named Matthew's Place, in honour of Matthew Sutherland, a 28-year old man who had been killed in October 2019 while experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg.⁶⁰

While they stood, the teepees provided culturally appropriate temporary shelter, warmth and community connection. Donations of wood, food, and warm clothing descended upon the location over following days, brought by community members who had heard the news. Encampment resident Darren Flett told CBC:

"I like it. It's good that there are ... people are coming out and they care. I kinda like it. It makes you feel like you're back in how we used to live. And that's how I wanna live."⁶¹

⁵⁷ "City to clean up remains of Osborne Bridge homeless camp following fire, high water," Global News. Accessed April 2020: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6110160/city-to-clean-up-remains-of-homeless-camp-following-fire-high-water/>

⁵⁸ "Donated warming huts for Winnipeg homeless torn down for violating by-laws," Global News. Accessed April 2020: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6254866/warming-huts-for-winnipeg-homeless-torn-down-for-violating-by-laws/>

⁵⁹ "Warming teepee built by community for Winnipeggers in need won't be taken down: city," CBC. Accessed April 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-teepee-homeless-shelter-1.5400003?cmp=rss>

⁶⁰ "Ojibway elder gifts teepee to homeless in honour of slain nephew," CBC. Accessed April 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/ojibwe-elder-gifts-teepee-in-memory-of-slain-nephew-1.5406441>

⁶¹ "Ojibway elder gifts teepee to homeless in honour of slain nephew," CBC.

Safety of the teepees and their fires became increasingly tenuous over the next two weeks. Donations of clean firewood dwindled, leading to burning of scavenged, chemically treated wood. Fires were left untended at times. The teepees became layered with donated cushions, chairs and blankets, restricting egress and ventilation while increasing fire risks. FPS regularly attended the site to monitor risks and share fire safety and prevention information.

Between January 3-14, 2020, a series of fires resulted in destruction of both teepees and a nearby tent. One individual was hospitalized for burns. The frequency and scale of the blazes posed an immediate threat to the life safety of residents. Between January 14-16, Main Street Project outreach workers connected with residents to negotiate relocation and alternate shelter. On January 16, the City of Winnipeg attended the vacated encampment to clear charred debris left by the series of fires. The destruction of the teepees, the relocation of residents and the clearing of debris deeply affected members of the wider community. OPK's Mitch Bourbonniere told CBC:

"I'm hurt because of the symbolism of the teepee. And what it represents. And so that part is very sad. But again we're relieved that no one was hurt. We're hoping that the folks there will get the help they need.... I'm still proud that the teepee went up because it was a statement.... It was up over Christmas and New Year's and the people there were visited and looked after and hugged and loved up by the rest of us."⁶²

Over the following weeks, the site gradually became repopulated by people and tents.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The next day, the Province of Manitoba declared its first presumptive positive cases. When a state of emergency was declared, businesses and services were closed in compliance with public health orders to "stay home:" an impossible ask for those living unsheltered.

End Homelessness Winnipeg convened a COVID-19 Response for the city's homeless-serving sector. A Working Group for Outreach Services and Unsheltered People was struck, with representatives from the strategy group and the Winnipeg Outreach Network (WON). A key issue for the Working Group was the sudden closure of spaces previously accessible to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Libraries, community centres, drop-ins, and group programming had disappeared, while only a few services expanded operations. This situation highlighted the need for comprehensive, coordinated street outreach to connect with people and provide timely information and supports. Interim measures were created, including a shared spreadsheet listing essential services that were open for individuals to access washrooms, phones, food, harm reduction and hygiene supplies on a walk-up or drop-in basis.

During the second half of March, outreach teams reported a drop in numbers of individuals encountered on the streets. But by early April, teams were reporting a marked increase in numbers of individuals observed taking shelter in bus shacks, doorways, yards, and parks. Some emergency shelters had limited their capacity to allow for social distancing between guests. Some individuals were reluctant to sleep in a congregate shelter setting for fear of contracting COVID-19. Yet others moved outdoors, as warmer temperatures made camping more appealing for them than staying in a shelter.

⁶² "2 teepees used by homeless in downtown Winnipeg destroyed by fire," CBC. Accessed April 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/matthews-place-teepee-burns-1.5427317?cmp=rss>

In April, Main Street Project opened a 24/7 shelter and drop-in space at 190 Disraeli as part of Winnipeg's COVID-19 Response from the homeless-serving sector. The space, offering cots, showers, food and connections to other services, quickly drew nearly 200 people per night and up to 100 during the day. Despite an increase in available, low-barrier shelter beds, nearby encampments did not disappear. In fact, they grew.

On May 8, an online emergency meeting of the Kíkininaw Óma strategy group was held in response to escalating concerns raised by outreach providers, police, FPS and concerned residents. Two encampment locations had become sites of near-daily, violent interactions resulting in police intervention. The violence was attributed to a range of factors, including:

- New arrivals at the encampments creating a disruption to social relations and networks
- Changes in drug supply leading to altered usage and associated behaviours for encampment residents who use drugs
- Changes in income leading to disputes over money that, in some cases, involved gangs

FPS raised ongoing concerns with fire and life safety risks, noting the impossibility of monitoring use of open fires, candles, propane and electric heaters. The positioning and reinforcement of shelters made it difficult to evacuate, or to enter when emergency medical services were needed.

The single greatest barrier identified to resolving these issues was the lack of access to a range of housing options that would meet the needs of individuals at the encampment. When one encampment location needed to be vacated in mid-May for a scheduled construction project, most residents simply relocated their tents to a nearby green space, rather than accept any of the available options for shelter. When another needed to be vacated in early June due to new escalation in frequency of dangerous fires, lack of desirable housing options was identified as a key reason why encampment residents were reluctant to move, despite the risks.

For many, these encampments are their homes and their fellow residents are their family. They choose to live in tents over available low-income housing options that may provide substandard or dangerous living conditions. Robert Russell, an encampment resident, described available temporary and low-income housing options as "atrocious."⁶³

"There's bed bugs, cockroaches, mice, rats, all in the same place...the rooms are very small, the locks on the doors don't work, so there's safety issues, so if you leave your place you might not come back and have your things there. It's not some place you really want to be."⁶⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many issues people in Winnipeg were already facing, highlighting the vital role of street outreach in supporting unsheltered people, and the need for 24/7 safe spaces and accessible, low-barrier, low-income housing alternatives.

⁶³ "Garbage truck, tractor brought in to clean up 2 Winnipeg homeless camps," accessed June 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/homeless-camps-ordered-to-come-down-1.5606393>

⁶⁴ "Fires, protest around Winnipeg homeless camps as city moves people out," accessed June 2020: <https://globalnews.ca/news/7048774/fire-starts-at-winnipeg-homeless-camp-as-officials-begin-to-move-people-out/>

MEDIA STRATEGY: Addressing Stigma and Shifting Paradigms

As one of the key goals of the Kíkinaw Óma group was to educate and speak out against stigma, engaging with media soon became a crucial component of the strategy. In June 2019, controversy surrounding the RFP resulted in increased news coverage on unsheltered homelessness. Apart from stories about the RFP itself, the news also revealed a trend of concern for participants involved in the strategy group. The term “meth camps” was coined in a couple of widely shared articles that linked encampments and unsheltered homelessness with methamphetamine use, theft, and violence. Winnipeg Police Service Constable Jay Murray told Global News on June 14 that he had not heard the term before:

“There may be a correlation between homelessness and substance addiction, but it isn’t causal. I don’t want to give the idea that every encampment is rampant with meth use or proceeds of theft.”⁶⁵

In July 2019, the strategy group identified the need for a communications strategy to:

- Develop shared language and messaging across all partners
- Shift public discourse away from stigmatizing concepts like “meth camps”
- Build awareness and educate the public on substance use, homelessness, outreach, displacement, and Indigenous land rights
- Grow engagement about this issue across networks, highlighting the need for accessible, low-barrier, low-income housing alternatives for people

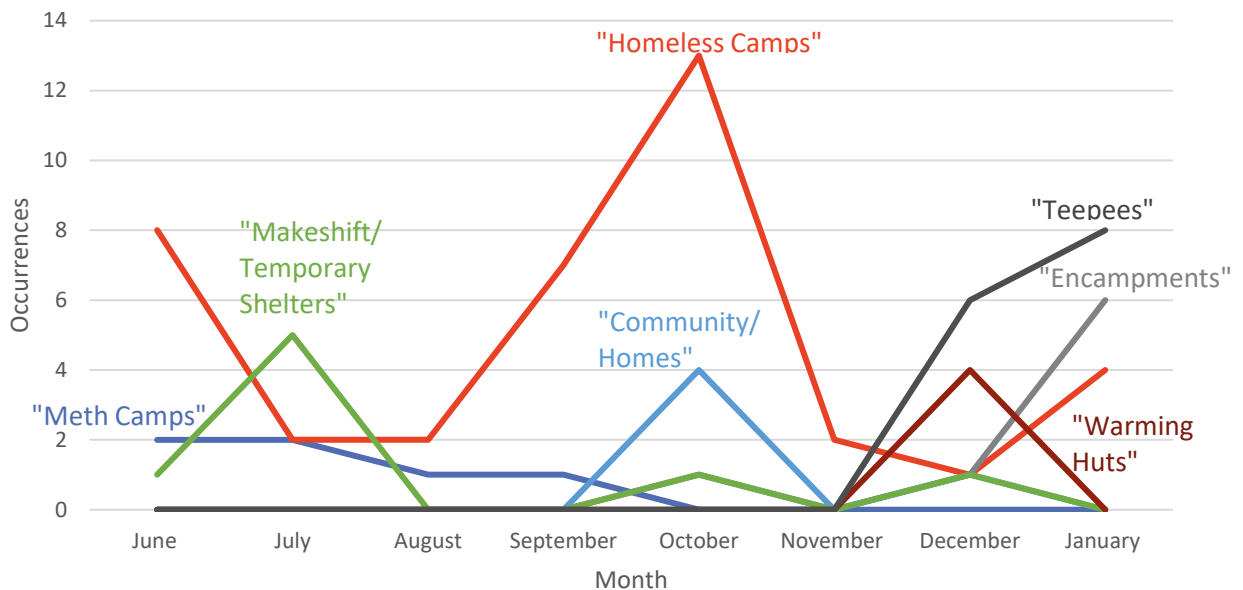
In August 2019, the strategy group agreed to principles for shared language and messaging (Appendix A). These principles guided participants’ interactions with media moving forward. A Communication and Education Working Group was struck to develop a strategy to confront stigma, build awareness and grow engagement.

Over the following months, a speakers list of contacts at participating agencies was developed, with a focus on community and lived experience, so that participants in the strategy group could direct media inquiries to people with diverse perspectives. Rather than having a single spokesperson represent the strategy group, participants were encouraged to interact with media from their unique roles and areas of expertise, while upholding the shared principles. Although this strategy was highly informal, it was in some ways very effective.

Analytics were reviewed for 82 news articles published between June 5, 2019 and January 31, 2020 specific to unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg. A scan of headlines from these articles revealed the term “meth camps” disappeared from local coverage by October 2019, while use of the terms “homeless camps,” “community” and “homes” increased. By January 2020, “homeless camps” had itself been superseded by “encampments,” a term for informal settlements used by UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing. The headlines suggested that less stigmatizing language was becoming more prevalent in local discourse on unsheltered homelessness. (Figure 3)

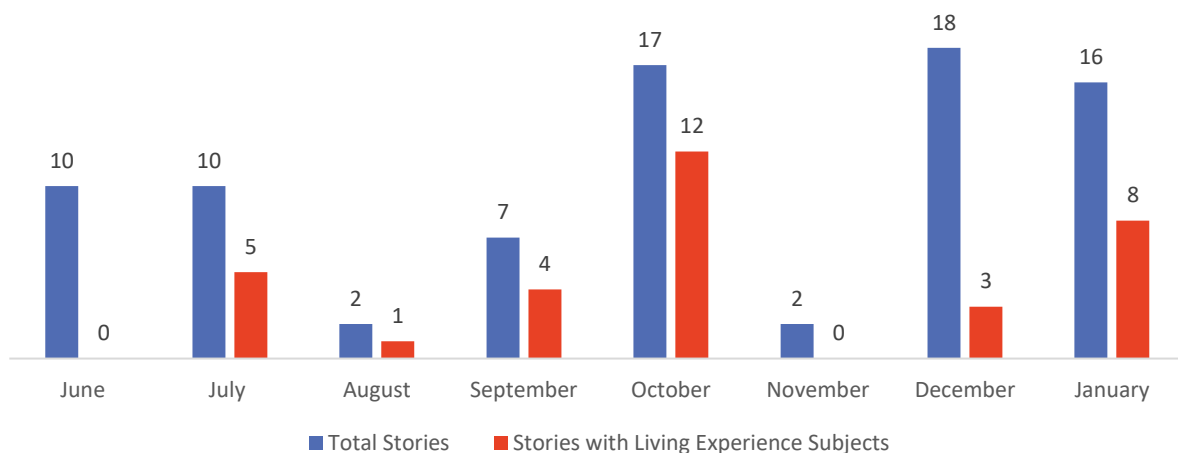
⁶⁵ “‘Meth camps’ showing up in city parks, says Winnipeg homeless advocate,” Global News. Accessed April 2020: <https://globalnews.ca/news/5385602/meth-camps-showing-up-in-city-parks-says-winnipeg-homeless-advocate/>

Figure 3: Headline Scan of Key Terms in Winnipeg Media Coverage of Unsheltered Homelessness, June 2019-January 2020



Media analytics also revealed a trend toward increased representation of individuals living in temporary encampments as interview subjects. Most often, issues related to homelessness are addressed in the media by people without lived experience, police, service providers or government representatives. While not a single article in June included the perspectives of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, more than two-thirds of articles from October, and half of those from January, did. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Representation of People with Living Experience of Unsheltered Homelessness in Winnipeg Media Coverage, June 2019-January 2020



While these trends reflected that the Working Group’s objectives to shift public discourse away from stigmatizing concepts, build public awareness and grow engagement were being met, this was not a linear process.

The Working Group observed that media discourse on unsheltered homelessness in Winnipeg tended to focus on crisis and controversy, rather than long-term solutions. Coverage peaked on the occasions of significant fires in October and January. Encampment residents interviewed for these stories did not uniformly find the experience empowering or respectful, as some individuals conveyed concerns to outreach workers. Lastly, in situations where City of Winnipeg officials needed to engage with residents to relocate items or individuals from sites where there were immediate threats to life safety, these actions were often portrayed by media as “eviction” or “tear down,” rather than emergency measures, undertaken in negotiation with residents and necessary to save lives.

In January, the Communication and Education Working Group determined that a key focus for its objective to build awareness and educate the public should be development of a toolkit for media reporting on homelessness. The toolkit (Appendix C) was developed in the spring and launched in advance of this strategy.

A final component of the Working Group’s efforts aimed to increase public awareness of unsheltered homelessness and engagement with the interim strategy by developing a 1-page guide for residents on what to do if they discover someone living unsheltered in a building entrance or yard (Appendix D).

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH: Engagement and Relocation

In January 2020, the Kíkininaw Óma strategy group adopted a rights-based approach, based on the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing’s 2018 report on adequate housing for residents of informal settlements.⁶⁶ This approach recognizes, first and foremost, that residents of encampments are rights claimants, whose human right to housing has been violated. The approach further recognizes that colonizing systems have been imposed on Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land and housing, and that individuals living in encampments face widespread discrimination, harassment, and criminalization on the basis of their housing status. The approach focuses on securing adequate housing while enabling communities to define, for themselves, what constitutes a home providing dignity and security.

This focus calls for direct engagement with encampment residents on their right to housing and housing needs, especially in advance of any required relocation effort. It calls for ensuring access to water and toilets for encampment residents, and alternate temporary accommodations where required. Lastly, it calls for all levels of government to be accountable for the right to housing, through planning, zoning, and budgeting measures that meet the need for affordable, safe, and suitable housing.

Comparing the work of the Kíkininaw Óma strategy group to this rights-based approach, it was apparent that the interim strategy had facilitated direct engagement with encampment residents concerning their rights and needs. Access to water and toilets, and government accountability for providing affordable, safe, and suitable housing options for all Winnipeg residents, remain largely unresolved challenges, that have become only more urgent in the context of COVID-19.

⁶⁶ “Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context,” United Nations General Assembly. Accessed April 2020: <https://www.undocs.org/A/73/310/Rev.1>

On April 30, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing released *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada* “to provide all levels of government with an understanding of their human rights obligations with respect to homeless encampments.”⁶⁷ The protocol offers a Canadian context for the rights-based approach outlined in the 2018 report on informal settlements. The Protocol’s key principles are:

1. Recognize residents of homeless encampments as rights holders
2. Meaningful engagement and effective participation of encampment residents
3. Prohibition of forced evictions of encampments
4. Explore all viable alternatives to eviction
5. Ensure that any relocation is human rights compliant
6. Ensure encampments meet basic needs of residents consistent with human rights
7. Ensure human rights-based goals and outcomes, and the preservation of dignity for encampment residents
8. Respect, protect, and fulfill the distinct rights of Indigenous Peoples in all engagements with encampments

⁶⁷ “A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create Housing

- **End Homelessness Winnipeg** is recommended to engage directly with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to identify housing models that will support their right to housing. Examples may include repurposed dormitories⁶⁸ or hotels⁶⁹, modular housing,⁷⁰ tiny homes⁷¹ or cabins.⁷²
- End Homelessness Winnipeg's **Housing Supply Action Committee** is recommended to engage with funders and developers to invest in building culturally relevant, low-income, transitional, low-barrier and supportive housing to meet the community's need.
- **Indigenous governments** are asked to partner with **Indigenous housing and homelessness organizations in Winnipeg** on coordinated housing and homelessness initiatives that meet the needs of the city's Indigenous community.
- This strategy joins the call for the **Government of Canada** to construct 300,000 new affordable and supportive housing units for low-income Canadians to address Canada's housing and homelessness crisis.⁷³
- **The Province of Manitoba**, as a housing funder,⁷⁴ is recommended to invest in 200 new units of supportive housing and 470 new units of rent-geared-to-income housing in Winnipeg, while maintaining existing housing stock.⁷⁵ If housing management is devolved, this strategy recommends that Indigenous organizations be prioritized to manage housing.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ "Edmonton moving forward with 207-unit supportive housing investment despite no provincial backing," accessed June 2020: <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/council-debates-short-term-housing-options-for-homeless-edmontonians>

⁶⁹ "Experts offer a blueprint for ending Toronto's chronic homelessness after COVID-19," accessed June 2020: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/05/27/experts-offer-a-blueprint-for-ending-torontos-chronic-homelessness-after-covid-19.html>

⁷⁰ "Temporary Modular Housing," accessed June 2020: <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/temporary-modular-housing.aspx>

⁷¹ "Tiny home village for veterans opens in Calgary this week," accessed June 2020: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/tiny-home-village-for-veterans-calgary-1.5337504>

⁷² "Residents move from tents into cabins at Kitchener's newest settlement for the homeless," accessed June 2020: <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/06/14/residents-move-into-one-room-cabins-at-a-better-tent-city.html>

⁷³ "Recovery for All," accessed June 2020: <https://www.recoveryforall.ca/>

⁷⁴ "Shared Priorities, Sustainable Progress: a 12-Month Action Plan for Manitoba Families," accessed June 2020, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pubs/shared-priorities-sustainable-progress.pdf>

⁷⁵ "Housing Models and Development Framework," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Housing-Models-and-Development-Framework-Edition-2.pdf>

⁷⁶ "Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation Three-Year Action Plan, 2019-2022," accessed June 2020: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/pubs/national-housing-strategy-2020.pdf>

- The Province's **Social Innovation Office** is urged to explore innovative ways of financing construction and operation of low-income housing.⁷⁷
- **The City of Winnipeg** is asked to update its housing policy, review zoning and permitting practices, as well as land sale and dispersal procedures, to facilitate low-income housing development. The City is also asked to offer incentives, through measures such as inclusionary housing, that support non-profit and private developers to help address the city's housing crisis.

2. Increase Income Supports

- This strategy supports the call for the **Government of Canada** to implement a national guaranteed minimum income.⁷⁸
- The strategy recommends that the **Province of Manitoba** increase Rent Assist from 75% to 85% of median market rent as part of its plans to enhance this vital program.⁷⁹ Further, it is recommended that implementation of the Canada Housing Benefit in Manitoba provide additional supports for, rather than replacement of, rental assistance measures to support low-income tenants.
- It is recommended that intake and access to **EIA and Disability Benefits** be streamlined for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, through a flexible and person-centred approach to service delivery.

3. Implement Coordinated Access

- This strategy recommends that **community organizations** across Winnipeg's homeless-serving sector collaborate on the design and implementation of a comprehensive Coordinated Access system by 2022, to help prioritize and match unsheltered individuals with available housing options using a shared information system.⁸⁰
- **End Homelessness Winnipeg** is called to provide facilitation and engagement for this process, as well as technical infrastructure and resources.
- The **Government of Canada** is asked to continue to fund and monitor implementation of the system through Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy.

4. Enhance Outreach

- It is recommended that **outreach services** continue to collaborate on providing comprehensive, coordinated street outreach coverage across the city, through enhanced communication and collaboration among outreach teams; by facilitating warm handoffs to other agencies that can support individuals' paths to housing; and by advocating collectively for necessary and increased resources from parent organizations and other funders.

⁷⁷ "2019 Reframe Housing Competition Winner Announced," accessed June 2020: <https://www.urbanmatters.ca/2019-reframe-housing-competition-winner-announced/>

⁷⁸ "Recovery for All"

⁷⁹ "Assisting Renters: Manitoba's Rent Assist in the Context of Canada's National Housing Strategy," accessed June 2020: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba%20Office/2020/04/Rent%20Assist.pdf>

⁸⁰ "Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy Directives," accessed June 2020: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/directives.html#h2.3-h3.4>

- **Outreach services** are also asked to engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness on practical options for upgrading their shelter in ways that meet their identified needs and support their right to housing.
- **End Homelessness Winnipeg** has a supporting role to play as a backbone organization in these efforts, by engaging outreach services directly in the creation and implementation of a Coordinated Access system and by facilitating coordination and communication among services.

5. Open Additional 24/7 Safe Spaces

24/7 Safe Spaces can be defined as welcoming places, free of bias or conflict, that are open around the clock. Safe spaces address immediate needs for shelter, food, community, culture, and referrals to health, housing and income assistance. Priority populations in need of 24/7 Safe Spaces in Winnipeg include youth, women, 2SLGBTQ+ people, Indigenous people, people who use drugs, and women and girls experiencing violence or sexual exploitation.⁸¹ Women, trans, Two-Spirit and gender non-conforming people are in need of an Indigenous-led safe space with experienced staff working from a gender-based analysis.⁸²

- **The City of Winnipeg** is called to implement its 24/7 Safe Spaces grant program
- **The Province of Manitoba and Government of Canada** are urged to match or exceed the City's investments, reflecting the trilateral commitments of the Illicit Drugs Task Force⁸³ and the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.⁸⁴

6. Continue the interim strategy and rights-based approach throughout the implementation phase of all other recommendations

The interim strategy has been effective in connecting unsheltered individuals with community supports and is part of a rights-based approach to encampments.

- **The Kíkininaw Óma strategy group** should continue to meet as needed, with participants working together to improve communications and data flow for the interim strategy, and to increase awareness of and engagement with these recommendations, the interim strategy, and associated resources.

⁸¹ "24/7 Safe Spaces in Winnipeg: A Brief Review of Existing Reports & Services," accessed June 2020: <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-24-7-Safe-Spaces-Redacted.pdf>

⁸² "Connecting the Circle: a Gender-Based Strategy to End Homelessness in Winnipeg," accessed June 2020: <https://wrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Connecting-the-Circle-Full-Web.pdf>

⁸³ "Recommendations to reduce the use and effects of illicit drugs within Manitoba's communities," accessed June 2020: <https://www.winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/2019-Illicit-Drug-Task-Force-Report.pdf>;

⁸⁴ "Reclaiming Power and Place – Calls for Justice," accessed June 2020: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

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Corinne Isaak	Kelly Mclure	Sharon Johnson
David Cole	Kim Sanford	Shaw Krauchi
Derek Resch	Kirsten Bernas	Tessa Blaikie-Whitecloud
Felicia Wiltshire	Kris Clemens	Wally Richard

Appendix A: Principles for Shared Language and Messaging

Established on August 20, 2019:

- **Use person-first language:** e.g. “People experiencing homelessness” or “people who use drugs,” rather than “the homeless” or “users”
- **Separate the issues:** homelessness, methamphetamine use, camping, panhandling and other issues often conflated in the media are distinct and often unrelated situations people experience
- **Refrain from stigmatizing drug use:** people who use drugs are not inherently more dangerous or less human than people who do not
- **Use strengths-based language:** move away from the language of “vulnerability” toward identifying individuals’ strengths, survival, agency and choices; address specific risks or harms when needed
- **Identify the need for low-income housing options:** refer to the UN declaration of housing as a universal human right to live where one finds security, peace, and dignity; when there is a lack of accessible, low-income housing, people have a basic right to shelter themselves
- **Identify our unique local context:** we are in a different situation here than in Vancouver or Toronto for example
- **Mention the collaboration for a long-term strategy:** identify partnership among police, City, outreach services, and individuals with lived and living experience to create long-term solutions

Added on January 16, 2020:

- **Identify colonialism as a root cause for Indigenous homelessness,** as outlined in the [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#)
- **Mention the rights-based approach outlined in the UN Rapporteur’s Report on the [Right to Adequate Housing for Residents of Informal Settlements](#),** prioritizing safety of, and consultation with, residents who are rights claimants for the universal human right to adequate housing

Appendix B: Terms of Reference - adopted October 15, 2019

Background

In June 2019, the City of Winnipeg issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a contractor to remove bulky waste including temporary shelters found on public property. ("PROVISION OF COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL OF BIOHAZARDOUS WASTE AND OTHER DEBRIS," [City of Winnipeg RFP](#)).

A coordinated community response called for the RFP to be pulled and a community-based approach to be implemented. The City of Winnipeg responded by rescinding the RFP and tasked End Homelessness Winnipeg to bring stakeholders together to develop a strategy of response.

The Supporting Unsheltered Winnipeggers group is developing and implementing this coordinated response.

Purpose

To identify how we can work together to best support and engage people experiencing absolute homelessness and sleeping rough in temporary shelters or unsheltered in Winnipeg.

Goals

The goal is to develop, implement and monitor a long-term strategy, and interim solutions, that support those who are unsheltered in Winnipeg by:

- Connecting those who are unsheltered with systems of support
- Educating, training, and speaking out against stigma
- Developing a shared understanding of, and working through a lens of, harm reduction
- Implementing communication across groups, including City of Winnipeg departments, Winnipeg Police Services, the homeless-serving sector, and people with lived/living experience
- Creating a systems-loop that supports people experiencing homelessness

Operating Principles & Values

Committee members commit to respecting the Principles for Shared Language and Messaging adopted by the Committee. (Appendix A).

- **Action-oriented**
- **Guided by people with lived/living experience of homelessness** – Centering power and control with people with lived experience and organizational representatives to listen.
- **Operating from a Collective Impact approach** – Collective Impact is defined as ‘the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.’ There are five conditions of Collective Impact:

1. Common Agenda

All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

2. Shared Measurement

Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.

3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Participant agencies are undertaking their own activities in relation to homelessness while coordinating responses through a shared plan of action.

4. Continuous Communication

Consistent and open communication is needed across the many stakeholders to build trust, assure mutual objectives, create common motivation, and evaluate and amend strategies on an on-going basis.

5. Backbone Support

Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Membership

Members will include representation from community groups, City of Winnipeg departments, and people with lived/living experience of homelessness.

Current members include (subject to change):

- End Homelessness Winnipeg
- Main Street Project
- Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre of Winnipeg Inc.
- West Central Women's Resource Centre/Right to Housing Coalition
- Mama Bear Clan/North Point Douglas Women's Centre
- WE24/Spence Neighbourhood Association
- City of Winnipeg Public Works, Corporate Communications, Community Services
- Winnipeg Police Services
- People with lived/living experience of homelessness

Once the initial membership is established, new members may be added by majority approval of the initial group. The Group may add ad-hoc members on a short-term basis for specific areas of discussion.

Members are expected to advise the chair/co-chair when attendance is not possible. Members who miss two or more meetings without explanation may be replaced.

Membership will be reviewed on an annual basis, when each member will have opportunity to re-affirm their membership, or decline.

spokespeople for the group will be decided by the committee.

Committee Functioning and Process

- Committee meetings will be managed and called by the chair and co-chair.
- Co-chairs will include representation from End Homelessness Winnipeg and a community organization.
- Meetings will be held every 6 weeks, or as needed, for a duration of approximately 1.5 hours.

- Members will participate in occasional meetings / activities between meetings as needed.
- Meetings will include sharing of stories from people with lived experience and/or best practices in the areas of discussion.

Working Groups

Working groups will be developed as required and take direction from the Committee.

Working groups will nominate a chair at their first meeting, who will be responsible for calling working group meetings and report back to the full Committee

Current working groups include:

Outreach, Research and Consultation:

- Purpose: To engage directly with unsheltered Winnipeggers and outreach providers; research best practices in Winnipeg and elsewhere.

Communication and Education:

- Purpose: To develop a communication/media strategy and develop training to confront stigma and build awareness of harm reduction, outreach, homelessness.

Continuum of Services and Information-Sharing:

- Purpose: To improve collaboration and info-sharing among organizations, tables and plans that are co-occurring related to unsheltered Winnipeggers; work together to offer a better continuum of services; explore use of an app or data-sharing interface for outreach providers.

Decision-Making

Decisions will be made by consensus. As much as possible, members will be provided with notice and details about major decisions in advance of meetings. In an event where consensus cannot be reached, a decision may be made by majority vote or at the discretion of the co-chair(s).

WHY THIS TOOLKIT WAS CREATED

Homelessness is an increasing public concern for communities across Canada. This is reflected in increasing news and media coverage in recent years.

People experiencing homelessness face stigma and discrimination on the basis of their housing status. Sometimes, this is reflected in coverage on homelessness.

By empowering media with facts and guidelines for reporting on homelessness, human rights can be better protected, and the public interest can be better served.

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* recognizes housing as a human right:

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** and medical care and necessary social services”

In Canada, the right to housing became law with the passage of the *National Housing Strategy Act* in June 2019.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, a State is violating international human rights law if any significant part of its population is deprived of access to basic shelter or housing.

People experiencing homelessness should be recognized and supported as rights claimants, rather than portrayed as criminals or stereotypes.

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Each person has a unique story to tell. In that sense, there are as many causes of homelessness as there are people experiencing it.

In general, the most common causes for a person’s first experience of homelessness are:

- Family or relationship breakdown
- Disabilities, including mental health and substance use disorders
- Evictions and poverty

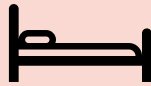
Most individuals who experience homelessness find themselves without a home for the first time as youth, between the ages of 18-20 years old.

TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Unsheltered: Sleeping outside, in tents, bus shelters, cars, doorways or empty buildings. 5-15% of homelessness



Emergency Sheltered: Staying in emergency shelters for adults, youth or family violence. 10-30% of homelessness



Provisionally Accommodated: Staying in transitional housing, hotels, motels, hostels, jails, hospitals, or "couch surfing" with family or friends, without any long-term agreement or plan. 60-80% of homelessness



At Risk: Living in housing that is too expensive, crowded or unsafe. 3-20X the total number of those experiencing homelessness



Many people experience **multiple types** of homelessness


"Homelessness in this city is a sickness. I don't care what anybody says, the system has failed. They keep tearing my camp down, making me move, but they don't give me a place to go."

– Kyle Landry to CTV, December 12, 2019

"It felt like I was invisible. I felt like I wasn't even a person... People didn't acknowledge me... I never acknowledged homeless people until I was homeless myself, but now I will never forget."

-Delaphine Bittern to the Free Press, March 23, 2020

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS



Colonizing systems have been imposed on Indigenous peoples' relationships to land and housing. In Canada, reserve and scrip systems, forced migrations, residential schools, Sixties Scoop and CFS policies have led to Indigenous peoples' experiences of homelessness.

Jesse Thistle's *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* identifies it as the outcome of historical and ongoing settler colonization and racism, that has displaced and dispossessed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from their traditional governance systems and laws, territories, histories, worldviews, ancestors and stories.

DO:

- **Use Person-First language:** e.g., “people experiencing homelessness” or “person living without a home”
- **Separate the Issues:** homelessness, substance use, panhandling and other issues are distinct and often unrelated situations people experience
- **Identify Strengths:** people experiencing homelessness are resourceful and collaborative, and are the experts on homelessness
- **Include the Voices of those with Lived and Living Experience:** include the first-hand experience of those without a home, rather than relying only on government or academic voices
- **Look at the System:** contextualize individuals’ experiences and stories within the colonizing and social systems that impact their lives
- **Identify Solutions:** highlight measures that can prevent and end homelessness, such as affordable housing, supports for families, accessibility, or mental health and harm reduction services

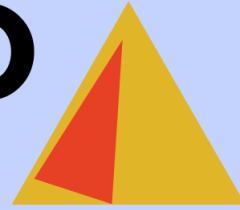
DON'T:

- **Do not define people by their circumstances:** e.g., “homeless person” or “the homeless”
- **Do not Stigmatize People:** Do not label people who are coping with a violation of their basic right to housing as “addicts” or “criminals”
- **Do Not Focus on Vulnerabilities:** describing people as “vulnerable” or “at risk” can be paternalistic and condescending. When needed, identify specific risks or harms people face
- **Do not Tokenize or Sensationalize those with Lived and Living Experience:** do not interview individuals who are in a state of crisis or intoxication, or share sensitive personal details
- **Do Not Blame the Individual:** focusing on a person’s choices or mistakes does not offer insight into the limited range of options society may have presented them with
- **Do Not Portray Homelessness as Inevitable:** homelessness has very specific social and economic causes and is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. Do not suggest that homelessness “has always existed” or is too complex to solve.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

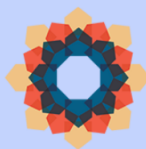
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
 - <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
- United Nations OHCHR: Annual Reports – Adequate Housing:
 - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>
- National Housing Strategy Act:
 - <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-11.2/FullText.html>
- Canadian Definition of Homelessness:
 - <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf>
- Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada:
 - <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>
- Framing homelessness for the Canadian public: the news media and homelessness:
 - <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/framing-homelessness-canadian-public-news-media-and-homelessness>
- Homelessness Coverage in Major Canadian Newspapers, 1987 – 2007:
 - <https://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/2417/2845>
- Winnipeg Street Census 2018 Final Report:
 - <http://streetcensuswpg.ca/2018-census/>
- 2018 Winnipeg Street Health Survey Final Report:
 - <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/2018-winnipeg-street-health-survey-report/>
- Connecting the Circle: A Gender-Based Strategy to End Homelessness in Winnipeg:
 - <https://wrcwrc.ca/connecting-the-circle/>
- Here and Now: the Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness:
 - <http://www.hereandnowwinnipeg.ca/>
- The 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg:
 - <https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/our-mandate/>

WHAT TO DO



If someone experiencing homelessness is sheltering in your building entrance or yard

- **People experiencing homelessness face a wide range of stereotypes and stigma that do not always reflect reality. Do not assume the person:**
 - **is dangerous:** people experiencing homelessness are far more likely to be victims of violence than to perpetrate it
 - **is intoxicated:** behaviour you might identify as intoxication could be a symptom of hypothermia, stroke, disability or mental health crisis
 - **has somewhere safe to go:** nobody chooses to live without shelter, unless their other options seem even less safe to them
- **If the person is awake, say hi. Ask if they need anything:** let them know you'll be calling outreach workers to pay a visit
- **Call Main Street Project Outreach: 204-232-5217**
- **If a person is in danger due to a medical or safety crisis, call 911**
- **Giving things like food, water, socks or money is OK** if you feel comfortable and the person accepts an offer
- **Inviting the person inside (as with any stranger) is discouraged,** for your safety and theirs
- **To offer info on other resources:** check 211, HelpSeeker or the Winnipeg Outreach Network Resource Guide
- **Be safe, be kind, be well**



main
street
project

