

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring a stylized 'E' followed by the word 'Edmonton' in a white sans-serif font, set against a dark blue square background.

Minimum Emergency Shelter Standards

What We Heard Report

July 2021
Affordable Housing & Homelessness
Social Development, Citizen Services

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INTRODUCTION

On March 15, 2021 City Council directed City Administration to develop minimum emergency shelter standards and operating requirements to mitigate impacts on communities and provide better service to clients. From April to July 2021, the City of Edmonton's Affordable Housing and Homelessness Section engaged individuals, organizations and community representatives - both within and outside of the shelter system - in the the development of these standards including:

- Ministry of Community and Social Services (CSS);
- Alberta Health Services;
- Individuals with lived experience in the shelter system;
- Homeward Trust Edmonton;
- Emergency shelter providers including Hope Mission, the Women's Emergency Shelter Centre (WEAC) and Mustard Seed;
- Edmonton Police Service (EPS);
- Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations;
- Indigenous service providers including Bent Arrow, Niginan Housing and Métis Urban / Capital Housing Corporation;
- Youth Emergency Shelter Services (YESS);
- Day service providers including Boyle Street Community Services and Bissell Centre;
- George Spady Centre;
- Community Leagues;
- Business Improvement Areas (BIAs);
- Representatives from the City of Edmonton's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee;
- Representatives from the Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Committee; and
- Representatives from the City of Edmonton's Accessibility Advisory Committee

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement was primarily conducted through virtual methods which limited staff's ability to connect with some communities, particularly those experiencing homelessness. Despite this challenge, the team endeavoured to be as thorough as possible in its engagement and seek out diverse perspectives and participants.

Through the engagement the team heard that there is broad philosophical support from all stakeholder groups for the draft minimum emergency shelter standards, as well as a desire to see greater coordination, consistency and use of evidence-based approaches in the sector. The following report provides a summary of common themes that were cited during these discussions, as well as notable areas of divergence between stakeholders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Edmonton wishes to thank the many individuals and organizations that shared their perspectives during this process to help improve Edmonton's shelter system for individuals experiencing homelessness.

STRENGTHS OF THE SHELTER SYSTEM

Support for Basic Needs

While some individuals with lived experience and shelter providers expressed satisfaction with the basic services currently provided in shelter, including access to identification, connection to programs such as income support, food, laundry, transportation, and recovery programming, the majority of individuals with lived experience, shelter providers, day service providers, community organizations and others engaged in this process felt that the quality and availability of shelter services in Edmonton is lacking, inconsistent and insufficient to address the complexity of needs among Edmontonians experiencing homelessness.

Enhanced Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many emergency shelter providers and day service providers indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in greater collaboration, communication and sharing of information within the homeless-serving sector. One example of enhanced collaboration is an app (Sharepoint: Inner City Intake) that is used by three service providers to share basic client information. Agencies indicated that this collaboration has had a positive effect and many expressed a desire to build on this success by establishing a shared data system for the entire sector.

Expansion of Shelter Services

One shelter provider spoke positively about the temporarily expanded shelter services in the southside Edmonton which allow individuals to more easily access services instead of needing to travel downtown to receive the support they need. They also noted that smaller sized shelters have recently emerged in Edmonton have been more successful than very large congregate settings. Noted positive impacts of smaller shelters include a reduction in critical incidents and a greater ability for staff to provide more intentional support to guests.

Shelter Staff

Some participants with lived experience spoke positively about shelter staff and the care they provide, although interactions and experiences with staff appeared to be inconsistent and vary significantly across agencies. Shelter service providers also spoke positively about the strengths of staff, including their passion, commitment and skills supporting individuals with complex needs.

CHALLENGES IN THE SHELTER SYSTEM

Urgent Need for Bridge and Supportive Housing

All stakeholders feel that there is a critical deficit of supportive and bridge housing in Edmonton, which has impeded Edmonton's ability to address and ultimately end homelessness. Without available housing, individuals staying in shelter are not able to transition to permanent housing and Edmonton continues to experience growing numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness.

Barriers to Shelter - Lack of Safety, Privacy, Storage and Dignity

Many individuals with lived experience indicated that certain shelter practices have deterred them from accessing services, which has left them with no other choice than to sleep outside, including one individual who referenced regularly sleeping in garbage bins. Specific examples of barriers include feeling unsafe in shelter, experiencing uncomfortable sleeping quarters, not being able to access the services they need, being banned from service, restrictive storage policies, concern about faith-based services, or needing to stay in large congregate settings which, in the words of one individual, feels like staying with 200 roommates.

Gap in Services for Mental Health and Substance Use

All stakeholders stated that mental health and addictions services are urgently needed as a result of the ongoing opioid crisis and complex mental health issues facing individuals experiencing homelessness. The shelter system is not equipped to provide these services and needs to be more closely integrated with Alberta Health Services to ensure individuals receive the support they need to be successfully housed and break the cycle of homelessness. The presence of unsupported people with complex needs can deter others from staying in shelter.

Lack of Coordination and Communication

All participants, with the exception of a few shelter providers, indicated that there is a lack of shared vision and accountability for the shelter sector, which has resulted in significantly different approaches, mandates and use of evidence-based approaches by each provider. Many stakeholders observed that insufficient communication and collaboration has exacerbated these challenges, as well as perceived rivalries or tensions between organizations.

Indigenous Cultural Competency

A majority of participants identified the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness and ongoing legacy of Residential Schools and colonization as a profound challenge in the shelter system. Many noted that there is no consistent approach to cultural programming and there are fundamental gaps in understanding of Indigenous cultures, ways of knowing and being in the sector as well as a lack of Indigenous staff and cultural competency training. Some stakeholders felt the design and operation of many shelter services are not historic-trauma informed. Going forward, stakeholders feel more culturally-based services are needed including ceremony, smudging, access to Elders and other supports to facilitate healing and reconnection to culture and kin.

Community Disorder

BIAs and Community Leagues spoke about the concentration of shelters and other social services in particular areas of the city and persistent challenges in terms of cleanliness, public urination and defecation, impacts on businesses and proliferation of encampments. Some also wondered why there appears to be less disorder in Calgary. Shelter providers expressed a desire to be good community neighbours but indicated that accessing services is voluntary and they sometimes have limited tools to address issues that are completely off-site, short of contacting EPS.

Gap in Staff Capacity and Training

Many shelter providers identified persistent challenges related to staff burnout and a lack of available training to support individuals with complex needs. Community representatives and advisory committee representatives spoke to the need for Indigenous culture and anti-racism training while service providers desired to see more training including overdose prevention, mental health crisis support, trauma-informed services and motivational interviewing but noted that training is not currently funded by the Government of Alberta and is independently determined by each shelter provider.

Data Collection and Sharing

Participants indicated that there is no shared database or information sharing system in the shelter sector. Many shelter providers, though not all, expressed a desire to collaborate more closely and share data including real-time data about available beds, banning and basic client information to inform decisions. From a community perspective, there is a desire to better understand system outcomes and demographic information through greater data collection and access.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE SHELTER SYSTEM

The Ministry of Community and Social Services, Homeward Trust, shelter providers and day service providers referenced a number of planned and ongoing improvements within the shelter system including:

- CSS and HTE are undertaking **information technology (IT) updates** to support greater consistency in data collection and access throughout the sector.
- **Improved staff training**, although it should be noted that this is occurring on an agency-by-agency basis and is not consistent across the sector.
- **Service improvements:**
 - Hope Mission is funding its own nursing team to support better access to health services and is in the process of becoming accredited.
 - WEAC is undergoing a transformation of its shelter services to become more housing-focused, trauma-informed and evidence-based.
- The Herb Jamieson, **a new purpose-built shelter**, is being built in Edmonton, the first new shelter development in the city in many years.

Despite the improvements listed above and interest from some shelter providers to evolve their service delivery, many stakeholders feel the shelter system is in need of more significant and comprehensive improvements, above and beyond what is currently happening, to effectively address systemic issues and challenges for guests as it relates to accessibility, substance use, and housing outcomes.

FEEDBACK ON GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following is a summary of the draft guiding principles that were shared with participants during the engagement:

- **Welcome all individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or physical ability**
- **Provide housing-focused and trauma-informed services**
- **Prioritize safety and client choice**
- **Respect clients’ cultural and spiritual identities**
- **Recognize and respond to the needs Indigenous guests with culturally appropriate and Indigenous specific operations/supports**
- **Collaborate across sectors and systems to ensure warm hand-offs through a continuum of care**
- **Provide access to a full spectrum of services from harm reduction to abstinence-based programming or ensure a warm hand-off to operators who provide these services if the operator cannot**

Summary of Feedback:

The majority of stakeholders expressed enthusiastic support for the draft guiding principles and felt that they were evidence-based and aligned with good practice.

Theme	Feedback
Housing-Focused Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stakeholders universally agree that shelters should be temporary and housing-focused, although many individuals with lived experience stated that shelters do not follow a consistent housing-focused approach in practice. ● Many shelter providers have different conceptions of what housing-focused services look like and indicated that there is not enough bridge and supportive housing to transition people to. Some shelter and day service providers wanted clarity about whether recovery programming, bridge housing or other supports would be considered examples of housing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some service providers and community representatives referenced the Calgary Drop In Centre as a successful shelter example and agreed that all programming in shelters should be housing focused. • Another, smaller, group indicated that there are programs that should be offered to support guest well-being and spirits even if they are not necessarily housing-focused, such as art classes.
Role of Other Service Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many day service providers and shelters feel that the guiding principles should recognize that shelters are not adequately positioned to address homelessness alone and must rely on and work in collaboration with a number of other systems to prevent and address homelessness, including the Government of Alberta for the development and funding of supportive housing, mental health supports and recovery programming. • From the perspective of shelter providers and day service providers, there was no consensus on the role of the Edmonton Police Service in the shelter system.
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Committee representatives and Indigenous organizations recommended strengthening 'welcoming all' language in the principles to focus on proactive inclusion and not just the removal of barriers. • Advisory Committee representatives wanted a greater diversity of identities and barriers reflected in the principles including the disability community, individuals with service animals, parents with children, and those with diverse religious beliefs. • There was recognition that there are more individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds experiencing homelessness which should be reflected in the standards. The principles should also be rooted in anti-racism and anti-colonialism.

Indigenous Cultural Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many community representatives, Indigenous organizations and agencies indicated that the guiding principles need to be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and reconciliation. • One community group also recommended adding a principle that recognizes the over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness.
Spiritual Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A majority of stakeholders, including day service providers, some shelter providers and Indigenous organizations, indicated that cultural and spiritual identities should be treated separately, and participation in faith-based practices in shelter should be voluntary rather than a prerequisite for receiving services. • Some expressed that faith-based services do not meet the needs of Indigenous peoples, particularly given the trauma communities have experienced as survivors of Residential Schools and colonization. • Others indicated that services that incorporate faith-based teaching and activities can present barriers to individuals trying to access shelter services and recovery programming, particularly if they are of a different faith or cultural background, and more options are needed.
Client Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and Social Services, shelter providers and day service providers were supportive of the idea of client choice and voluntary participation in services. Others agreed with that philosophically but indicated limited options to offer guests in the system makes prioritizing client choice difficult if not impossible. • BIAs and Community Leagues raised questions about how to address concerns when client choice conflicts with community safety. • Some shelter providers also indicated that they did not know how to support individuals who refused services or could not comply with behavioural expectations due to substance use, cognitive impairment or mental illness.

Spectrum of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All stakeholders provided positive feedback about having a spectrum of services in the system, from abstinence to harm reduction programming.• Some providers and community representatives passionately supported the inclusion of harm reduction services and safe consumption services in every shelter so that individuals do not need to travel to multiple agencies to receive the support they need.• Others agreed that these services are urgently needed but expressed concern about having a full spectrum of services in every shelter and instead advocated for looking at system-wide capacity for harm reduction and safe consumption services.
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FEEDBACK ON OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 1: OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

The following is a summary of the draft standards that were shared with participants during the engagement:

Outcome Statement:

- Increase in the number of shelter spaces in Edmonton that are considered to be low-barrier
- Reduce the number of individuals choosing to sleep rough when there is available shelter space
- Minimal, or reductions in, the number of critical incidents occurring at shelters

Draft standards:

- 24/7 operations for all emergency shelters
- Suitable sleeping areas, nutrition, laundry and pet options
- Safe and secure storage
- Showers and bathrooms in alignment with current building code
- Good Neighbour Commitment

Summary:

There was broad support across all participants to improve the accessibility of shelters, move towards 24/7 operations, and implement Good Neighbour Commitments. However, there were diverging perspectives about how to achieve these goals, as well as questions about funding / resourcing of improvements.

Theme	Feedback
24/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24/7 shelter operations were universally supported, although interpretations varied about what this means in practice. • Multiple individuals with lived experience referenced the need for 24/7 services, with one individual expressing concern about having to wake up at 6:30 am in the morning to leave the shelter at 7:00 am.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Potential positive impacts of 24/7 supports include minimizing queuing and community impacts, providing needed support during the day for individuals and increasing overall accessibility.
Sleeping Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many individuals with lived experience stated they have poor quality sleep in shelter and prefer sleeping in beds rather than bunk beds, which are dangerous, especially for Elders or those with health issues. ● Shelter providers shared feedback about the feasibility of various bed options in a shelter context. In general, cots were not supported as they are difficult to sanitize, break often and are not comfortable. ● Some service providers and Community and Social Services indicated mats are needed for harm reduction and those who are intoxicated however most participants believe that mats are not the best option for most clients. ● A smaller group indicated that mats are not dignified and unnecessary, and beds can be used just as safely with the implementation of bed rails, or beds located lower to the ground for low mobility clients.
Good Neighbour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There was broad agreement about the need for positive relationships between shelters and community. ● EPS, BIAs and Community Leagues want to see enforced Good Neighbour Commitments to regulate external areas, particularly as it relates to cleanliness, garbage, drug use, line ups, social disorder, encampments and individuals in crisis. ● Shelter providers did not disagree with implementing Good Neighbour Commitments but raised logistical and legal concerns about their ability to be responsible for individuals in crisis who are off-site. One organization noted that some individuals cannot meet behavioural expectations due to cognitive impairment, mental illness or addictions, and shelters have limited tools to enforce rules, short of calling the police.

<p>Spacing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One individual with lived experience indicated that individuals are located too closely together in shelter and need more space to be comfortable. ● One shelter provider agreed with 2 metre spacing in principle because appropriate distancing between guests helps with client dignity, reduces aggression and supports overall hygiene. However, there would be impacts on how many people that can be accommodated in a particular shelter.
<p>Storage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individuals with lived experience raised many concerns about storage practices in shelter including the inability to move their items in and out when they need to, having to throw out possessions that they cannot bring into shelter and having possessions stolen or go missing including medication. ● Some providers indicate they have amnesty approaches already. A small number of stakeholders indicated that storage can be challenging as shelters are not set up for a large volume of storage or hoarding situations. There are also potential staffing implications of monitoring and providing frequent access to belongings.
<p>Food Provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple individuals with lived experience expressed a desire for better quality food that is more readily accessible. ● There was broad agreement amongst shelter providers that there should be food offerings for guests when they are hungry, regardless of the time they enter the shelter. However, there were different perspectives on how to best accomplish this goal, with concern about grab and go food service and 24/7 provision of hot meals. ● There were also concerns regarding feasibility, cost and logistics of different food provision options, given food is often procured through donations. There was a lack of clarity about what culturally appropriate food means and questions about the need to accommodate conscientious diet choices. ● There was general support for having snacks or extra meals on hand for those who need food at off-times. There was also support for longer meal times over a few hours to cut down on line ups and support greater accessibility.

Towels, Clothing and Blankets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple individuals with lived experience spoke about the critical need for towels, clothing and blankets in shelter to support hygiene and comfort.
Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some agencies expressed support for the admission of pets and referenced the National Alliance to End Homelessness' pet policy.• Another shelter provider raised concerns about the feasibility of allowing pets, including impacts on other clients and staff safety.

OUTCOME 2: SERVICE DELIVERY STANDARDS

The following is a summary of the draft standards that were shared with participants during the engagement:

Outcome Statement:

- Increase the number of individuals securing permanent housing from shelter
- Increase the number of individuals being diverted to temporary housing options that are more suitable for their circumstances
- Reduce the number of unique individuals accessing shelter services
- Reduce the average length of stay for regular shelter clients

Draft Standards:

- Have a public admissions policy on behavioural expectations and required participation in housing programs and other specialized programming
- Ensure decisions on restricted access made based on a clearly defined policy that is posted publicly
- Provide referrals and arrange transport for guests who are best suited to a different shelter based on their needs
- Undertake a comprehensive intake process within 24 hours of a guest's admission
- Provide pathways to housing first and specialized programming including:
 - Diversion and Housing First
 - Mental Health and Addictions
 - Indigenous Support Programming
 - LGBTQ2S+ policy and inclusion
 - Appropriate diversion to youth services

Summary:

There is broad support for diversion to more permanent housing options, in recognition that shelter stays should ideally be brief and non-recurring. There is also significant support for greater integration with the health system to support better access to mental health and addictions supports, as well as greater Indigenous cultural programming within the sector.

Theme	Feedback
Reduction in length of stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter providers, day services providers and Homeward Trust generally understand the intention of this outcome (to reduce chronicity) but felt that it should not be considered a metric for success. Individuals may have valid reasons for staying in shelter for a longer than average period of time, depending on their circumstances, and this outcome could encourage shelters to cut off services to individuals in need.
Reduction in Unique Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many understood and supported the overall intention of reduction in the number of unique individuals accessing shelter but ultimately felt this is an ineffective metric. Some shelters pointed out that the number of individuals accessing shelters can be impacted by a number of variables outside of the control of shelters, and that reduction in homelessness is not possible without an increase to supportive and bridge housing beds. Others indicated that some housed individuals access day services in shelter such as food, laundry, etc. and wondered how this would be accounted for in data collection.

Housing Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders broadly agreed that long waitlists for housing and a lack of supportive housing and bridge housing make it difficult to move individuals through the system and into permanent and appropriate housing. One agency also felt that housing should not be seen as a binary - either housed or not - but rather as a spectrum of support. There were also questions about how diversion is defined - whether that is diversion to operated facilities or natural support systems.
Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shelter service providers and other agencies raised questions about how intake is defined - whether it is an initial conversation or comprehensive assessment. Shelter providers, service providers and CSS indicated that 24 hours is too short a period of time to complete an intake, especially if someone is intoxicated or needs time to stabilize. Instead, most providers suggested 1 - 3 days for intake and emphasized that an individual needs to be ready in order to participate.
Warm Hand-Offs / Referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm hand-offs / referrals are broadly supported but defined differently by shelter providers. Some feel a warm hand-off could require traveling off-site to accompany a vulnerable person to another service provider. Another shelter indicated that they will call another shelter but staff are not trained to go off-site. Some providers also raised questions about implications for staff resourcing and transportation.
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few shelter providers and Indigenous organizations referenced the need for security in shelter, both for guests to feel safe and for staff. Some suggested security measures include cameras, alarms, walkie talkies, although there was recognition this could contribute to a more institutional feeling in shelter which is generally not supported.

Banning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals experiencing homelessness referenced being banned for a variety of reasons including: being intimate with their partner, being involved in a fight, intervening in a domestic violence situation and being intoxicated. Some did not know why they were banned. • Some stakeholders, particularly day service providers and Indigenous organizations, indicated that banning occurs too frequently in shelters, and is inconsistently approached across the system. There needs to be greater transparency and consistency in banning practices, as well as staff training to support de-escalation.
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders identified a critical need for mental health services for individuals experiencing homelessness. • Shelter providers indicated that they do not provide these services themselves and there are not enough community mental health supports to refer people to. • Greater integration with Alberta Health Services is needed, as well as medical staff on site and staff training to help those with complex needs.
Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals in shelter need access to basic medical care including physical health, wound care and storage of prescription of medication • There are challenges in terms of accessing information from the medical system to understand people's diagnoses and needs. Multidisciplinary teams are needed on site, including nurses, to support access to medical databases to understand the full history and needs of the individual.

<p>Harm Reduction and Substance Use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individuals with lived experience expressed significant concern regarding the use of drugs and impacts of the opioid epidemic. One individual referenced using 21 naloxone kits in 2 weeks and stated that shelters need 24/7 doctors and nurses on site to assist guests in need. ● The need for harm reduction, low barrier services and safe consumption services was universally identified by all stakeholders, including shelter providers that would not provide these services themselves. ● Some individuals feel alcohol and drugs should be allowed in shelter so that people do not need to leave the shelter to use outside, while others were concerned about the presence of substances in shelter. ● The closure of George Spady's shelter services was widely seen as having significant and concerning impacts on the sector's intoxic capacity and ability to serve those with complex needs, as not all shelter providers provide these types of services. ● Some Community Leagues, shelter providers, day service providers spoke strongly about the need for safe consumption and overdose prevention services in all shelters, especially given the opioid crisis. ● A small number of shelters expressed concern about requiring harm reduction services in all shelters. Some shelter providers also referenced the need for additional recovery spaces, and indicated there are current delays or weeks or even months to access these services.
<p>LGBTQ2S+ Guests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many shelter providers expressed they don't know how to support the LGBTQ2S+ community in a safe and inclusive way, and are looking for resources / information. ● Many other stakeholders echoed this sentiment and felt that there are not enough safe spaces that are truly welcoming and accepting. Some expressed faith-based services can be traumatizing or unwelcoming for members of the LGBTQ2s+ community. ● There is also need for gender neutral spaces in shelter for those who are non-binary, as well as particular supports for those who identify as trans*.

Indigenous Cultural programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was universal recognition about the importance of Indigenous cultural programming, given the vast over-representation of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness.• Many indicated the predominance of faith based services is not welcoming for Indigenous guests, given the ongoing legacy of colonialism and Residential Schools.• Indigenous organizations indicated that shelters should ensure cultural supports are offered proactively, not just if requested. Many individuals may not know they can ask for access to an Elder, smudging, ceremony or other supports. There is also an opportunity to connect individuals to their culture and kin, but that requires staff who have connections to Indigenous communities.• Some shelter providers expressed a desire to enhance support for Indigenous peoples or partner with organizations to build capacity and develop staff understanding, although others expressed concern about requiring participation in cultural programming for both Indigenous or non-Indigenous peoples, and raised the need for other types of cultural programming.• Some community stakeholders and Indigenous organizations indicated there should be an Indigenous-led and operated shelter in Edmonton and the lack of this is a significant gap.
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OUTCOME 3: INFRASTRUCTURE STANDARDS

The following is a summary of the draft standards that were shared with participants during the engagement:

Outcome Statement:

Emergency shelters in Edmonton adopt best practices as outlined below when conducting a redesign of an existing shelter space or building one from the ground up in order to:

- **Improve service delivery**
- **Decrease negative community impacts**
- **Increase accessibility for guests with physical, cognitive and mental health needs.**

Draft standards:

- **Private or semi-private sleeping spaces and separate day space**
- **Barrier free and gender neutral washrooms**
- **Predictable layout**
- **Enhanced materials to prevent noise transfer**
- **Private area for smoking**

Summary:

Participants understand that many infrastructure standards would require investment and should be implemented on an opportunity basis. There was broad support for deinstitutionalizing spaces, ensuring exteriors of shelters are a deterrent from loitering and encampments, and incorporating more human-centred design. There was also general, though not universal support, for moving towards smaller shelters.

Theme	Feedback
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many non-shelter stakeholders feel shelters are cold, rigid, institutional environments that are not welcoming, with one respondent likening the atmosphere to being in prison.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates such as natural light, rounded walls and natural paint colours were broadly supported to deinstitutionalize and humanize spaces. • Shelter providers expressed an interest in improving shelter environments but indicated most shelters are not purpose-built and capital dollars are not available. Some also felt different shelter layouts could have staffing implications.
Washrooms and Hygiene services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple individuals with lived experience in the shelter system referenced the need for more accessible and appropriate hygiene services in shelter, including feminine products. • Gender neutral washrooms were generally supported by providers, although a couple of shelters expressed concerns and did not want them included in the standards. • Some shelter and day service providers raised concerns about safety and overdoses in washrooms. Some indicated shelters need doors with locks and an appropriate staffing complement to monitor washrooms appropriately. • Some Community Leagues and BIAs mentioned the need for publicly accessible washrooms to reduce the incidence of public urination and defecation.
Sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many shelter and day service providers, though not all, support private and semi-private sleeping areas, with some referencing temporary wall structures as a possible option for larger congregate settings, if funding is available.
Private Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many providers, though not all, support the idea of private courtyards to provide privacy for guests and minimize community impacts.
Cultural Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Indigenous organization stated shelters should have a space for cultural activities including sweats, smudging and feasts.

Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple individuals with lived experience in shelter stated that there are too many people in shelters which feels uncomfortable and overwhelming. • Most day and shelter providers expressed concern about large congregate shelter spaces because of the increased likelihood of conflict, incidents and discomfort for guests. • In general, stakeholders agreed that smaller shelters are most effective and allow for the best quality of care for individuals experiencing homelessness. Many shelter providers indicated that shelters should be 50 people or less to enable intentional, 1:1 support. Otherwise, staff are mostly focused on crowd and crisis management.
Shelter Exterior	Most shelter providers, Community and BIAs feel that shelter exteriors should be designed to be a deterrent to loitering and encampments, while ensuring the inside of shelter is welcoming and comfortable.
Miscellaneous	One shelter indicated proper ventilation is needed in shelters going forward, especially given the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

NEXT STEPS

The feedback outlined in this report will be considered in the development of the final standards that will be presented to City Council in summer 2021. If approved, further discussions will occur with stakeholders regarding implementation of the standards.