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Communications & Research

What We Heard Report

Homeward Trust Edmonton

Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness - Service Provider Engagement

Report prepared by: Y Station Communications & Research
Fall 2023

A note on language: In many cases the language and terminology written in this report is that used by the participants. We also recognize the ever-changing nature of language within this sector. This report aims to use inclusive, current, and representative language as much as possible, but we acknowledge that the terminology in this report may not always align with what all readers identify most with.

A note to the reader: The feedback in this report is representative of a specific point in time and is not necessarily reflective of the ongoing and fluctuating state of the sector. The feedback in this report was gathered during sessions in Fall of 2023.

Executive Summary

In 2024, Homeward Trust and the City of Edmonton will be presenting a new *Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* to Edmonton City Council for information and support and then to the sector and community to be realized. The original *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness* was first developed in 2007 and updated in 2017.

As part of the development of the new Plan, the project team engaged service providers in the housing and homelessness sector in amiskwacîwâskahikan to hear about their priorities and concerns. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Service Provider Engagement, outlining some of the themes and critical considerations participants identified.

Project Background

When the 2017 Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness was developed, Edmonton had seen a 40% reduction in homelessness over the last 10 years–largely attributed to the emphasis on housing first as a best practice. Bringing forward that momentum, the 2017 Plan called for an increase in funding for homelessness interventions; increases in affordable housing; deliberate system centralization; an emphasis on data-driven decision-making across the sector; and greater attention to person-centric care to provide focus on equity-deserving communities.

This progress on the 2017 Plan is important and it should be celebrated as the collective work of a strong and dedicated sector, but the disruptive conditions of the pandemic have reverberated throughout the complex landscape that must coordinate to prevent and end homelessness. At the end of 2023, the economic, housing market, and social support conditions we see are materially different from those we developed our previous plan on in 2017. In almost every way that matters to finding ways to serve people who are precariously housed or experiencing homelessness, our current conditions are worse.

However, as we look to build the new Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, our current conditions present some important opportunities that can inform how the sector moves forward to house people.

The Role of Service Providers in the Community Plan

The new Community Plan will take a variety of inputs into consideration, including the Service Provider Engagement summarized in this report, lived and living experience engagements, in-depth interviews with organizations working in the sector, review of sector performance and trend data, governance practices, and existing sector structure. The Community Plan will be presented to the public and to City Council in the spring of 2024.

The purpose of this engagement in particular was to listen carefully to service providers, agencies, partners and non-profits working in the homeless-serving sector an opportunity to share their honest, unfiltered feedback and to glean insights, recommendations, and directions that will help inform the new Community Plan. This included the diverse perspectives of not only the leadership of these organizations, but the people and teams providing services directly on the front line. This engagement was designed to ensure we captured input from myriad perspectives and experiences, and then to find the common threads between them all.

The engagement guided participants through a series of questions that helped the project team answer:
- What's working in the context of solving houselessness in the region today?
- What's getting in the way? What gaps and roadblocks can we start to address?

- What has changed and what new issues or environments exist that we haven't had to consider before?
- How might the sector work together better to solve homelessness?
- What can we do to improve the Community Plan moving forward?

Overarching Themes

It is important to note that the goal of this engagement was to identify gaps in our existing systemic approach, as well as areas of opportunity to improve upon the current efforts in the sector. To that end, this is a direct reflection of the general thoughts of the participants. The themes found throughout this report may appear critical or supportive of existing initiatives and practices; many of the themes may appear contradictory. That is perfectly normal - this report is an interim step leading to the plan. It is not designed to articulate the final Community Plan recommendations, but rather inform them in the context of many other sources.

Similarly, this engagement asked workers from all areas of the sector to contribute, so some of the feedback in this report may seem contradictory. Please keep in mind as you read this report that this is a summary of what we heard, and not a prescribed list of recommendations that the project team will necessarily incorporate into the final Community Plan.

The participants of these sessions showed up in force and provided insightful, powerful feedback. Key high-level themes emerged consistent across both in the in-person sessions and in the online survey included:

- Individuals and organizations alike feel they are **working in silos, rather than collaboratively**. This causes disconnects, inefficiencies, and a frustrating and even traumatizing experience for the clients they serve.
- The **funding structure and sources creates competition** between the service providers, which is a contributor to the siloing. Organizations are fighting over the same pot of money rather than working together toward a common goal.
- There is **not enough affordable supportive, transitional, and non-market housing**, and those that do exist are not always flexible or robust enough for the clients' needs.
- Clients have **higher complexity needs** that are not being addressed by the current systems in place. Mental health, addictions, disabilities, and other factors are not adequately addressed, which makes it increasingly difficult to keep clients housed.
- Many existing programs and practices, like housing first, supportive housing, and bridge housing, are seen as **successful models** that can be further adapted and expanded upon to continue making positive strides in this sector. Similar sentiments exist about other programs like the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI).
- There is a need for more opportunities to discuss the sector and **share frontline experiences**. Participants wanted more forums to discuss current contexts and emerging issues with formal gatherings and opportunities to listen to one another on a regular basis.
- **Front line workers are making the difference.** Despite many challenges faced in the sector, a common theme throughout is that the folks who are working directly to serve the community are having a positive impact in this space.

Further insights from the engagement are provided in the Findings section on page 7.

Methodology

Communication and Outreach

To invite participants to the session, the project team compiled an outreach list that comprised a broad selection of service providers, including government agencies, funders, partners, and grassroots organizations. These individuals and organizations were contacted via email and reminders, and were encouraged to share the engagement information with their staff and other contacts who might be interested. Email reminders were also sent to this cohort at the end of the first in-person day. Agencies and organizations on the project team (including the City of Edmonton and Homeward Trust), were not invited to provide feedback, as they acted as facilitators and resources for participants in the sessions themselves.

Engagement Design and Outcomes

The engagement included two days of in-person drop-in style, facilitated sessions November 1 and 2 from 8:30am – 5:30pm, as well as an online survey that was open from October 30th to November 24, 2023. In total, 177 individuals participated, with 80 people attending in person and 97 online-only survey responses collected.

The in-person session comprised several categorized stations with open-ended questions at each. Prior to engagement in the session, a soft-seating area was provided to allow attendees to review any material provided at the session, acclimatize to the environment, connect with other attendees, and begin the engagement at their own leisure. Based on their engagement preference, participants would move through the stations either on their own (through the digital survey or on paper through a workbook) or as part of a small group supported by a facilitator (or a mix of both), engaging in discussion and answering as many questions as they'd like. These stations are outlined in more detail in the Findings section of this report below.

The digital survey mirrored the questions asked in the in-person session. Not all participants answered every question, but every question was answered by multiple—if not most—participants. This provided participants with an identical process regardless of how they chose to engage.

In-person participants could write their thoughts down on sticky notes on display boards, on a workbook, on their mobile devices, or they could have a facilitator and note taker write their thoughts down for them. Participants typically spent between 90 minutes and 2.5 hours at the in-person sessions, though some spent up to four hours discussing and working through the questions with facilitators and other attendees.

The notes and workbooks from the in-person sessions resulted in over 20,000 words transcribed (including 2,000 words transcribed from sticky notes), and the online survey resulted in another nearly 25,000 words of open-ended question responses, enough to fill a 200-page novel.

Principles of Engagement

The session was designed to allow participants to feel as safe and comfortable as possible, with an awareness that many service providers are already feeling overstretched and overwhelmed. The design also took into consideration the emotional and mental energy required when discussing these topics, as well as various power dynamics that could make them feel uncomfortable answering freely.

These internal principles guided the session design, survey questions, and communications messaging:

- **The Visiting Way** – *keeoukaywin*, or The Visiting Way, is an Indigenous approach to research and engagement developed by Dr. Janice Cindy Gaudet. This decolonized methodology centres relational ways of knowing, and is "caring, respectful, and grounded in self, place, land, and family" (Gaudet 2019).

- o *How this was achieved:* Indigenous consultants pipikwan pêhtâkwan helped to develop an engagement approach with The Visiting Way at its core, rooted in community care, accountability, and connection.
- **Flexible** – This process was designed to accommodate anyone interested in participating, no matter how they wanted to engage and how much they were able to give.
    - o *How this was achieved:* Participants could drop in at any time during the two-day period, or they could answer the survey on their own time for an additional 3-week period after. They were encouraged to take breaks, come and go as needed, and to take as much time as they wanted to think about and discuss the questions being asked. Participants could engage through any number of methods: alone, in groups, on a device, on paper, through conversation, or a combination of these.
- **Supportive** – Understanding the inherent trauma in this sector, it was important that participants had access to resources if they needed them.
    - o *How this was achieved:* Mental health experts and Indigenous elders were present at both in-person sessions. Each day began with a smudge and prayer led by an Elder. Soft seating, quiet spaces, and refreshments were also available to create a comfortable environment. Personalized interviews and attention from facilitators was also made available in some cases.
- **Informed** – Participants should feel adequately informed about the questions they are being asked to answer.
    - o *How this was achieved:* Issues summaries were provided as hard copies at the in-person session and embedded in the online survey. Subject matter experts were also available to answer participants' questions. There were no mandatory survey questions, so if a participant did not feel informed enough to answer, there was no obligation to.
- **Safe** – Recognizing that there are power dynamics at play in this sector, it was imperative that participants had an opportunity to speak freely without the fear of repercussions.
    - o *How this was achieved:* The in-person session incorporated third party facilitators to allow participants to feel comfortable speaking openly. Participants could also answer any question independently on their own workbooks or on the online survey if they preferred not to be part of a discussion. Participants in person and online had the opportunity to engage anonymously.

What We Heard – Findings from the Engagement

Pulse Question: Inform Station

The very first station of the engagement provided an opportunity for in-person participants to read various issues summaries and to acquaint themselves with the engagement process. The issue summaries were also provided digitally to all in-person and digital survey participants.

In this station, online and in-person participants were also asked a pulse question about the hardest part of working in this sector in the last few years. This provided an opportunity to get their initial, and often most personal thoughts on paper before starting on more specific, issues-based questions. Below are the most common themes when it comes to what participants felt has been difficult in the recent years.

Addictions and drug poisoning. The opioid crisis specifically (though not exclusively) was noted by many participants as a growing challenge in the last few years, with far-reaching impacts that exacerbate many of the other issues in the sector.

Preventable deaths. The loss of life and the increase of preventable deaths in Edmonton's most vulnerable populations has weighed heavily on many service providers. Participants also noted the impact of that loss on the community, including re-traumatization and the lack of coping mechanisms.

Staff burnout. Participants often mentioned feeling overworked, under-resourced, underpaid, and undertrained for the complexity of the issues they deal with. They also mentioned that compassion fatigue and their own mental health challenges make working in this sector particularly difficult. Some participants also mentioned not feeling safe or heard when expressing their opinions about the work being done in the sector, and feeling pressure to meet quotas required by funders that reduces the quality of care they can provide to their clients.

Not enough non-market housing. Many participants expressed frustration that the housing options are not sufficient for the needs of the community.

Insufficient community supports. Participants often noted that they are seeing higher acuity clients whose needs are not adequately supported for long-term success. This showed up primarily in the context of mental health, trauma, addiction, and physical health.

Silos within the sector. Participants often mentioned a lack of alignment and coordination within the sector, making it difficult and time consuming to provide proper care for their clients.

Complexity of the system. Participants mentioned various barriers to access that prevent their clients from receiving proper care, even if the supports were available. This was identified as a challenge not only for the clients who struggle to navigate the system, but also for front-line workers who had difficulties keeping up with changes and understanding how to best connect their clients to the supports they need.

Station 1 - Priorities

STATION PURPOSE: In Station 1, service providers were asked to identify some of the key priorities in housing and houselessness in Edmonton. They were asked questions about the main reasons individuals experience houselessness, what they saw as the most critical systemic issues in Edmonton's housing sector, and what their organization's housing priorities are specifically. Below are some key priorities identified in this station.

Mental health, trauma, and addictions. Many participants identified that a lack of timely, trauma-informed, and ongoing support for clients with complex needs makes it difficult to find appropriate housing, and for those who have found housing to sustain it.

Stigma, systemic racism, and discrimination. Discrimination, racism, and stigma was referenced in a number of contexts throughout the session. Some participants mentioned there is stigma around Housing First and other housing programs, with landlords refusing to house Housing First clients and community members opposing development. Medical racism and discrimination within the healthcare system was also mentioned, as well as colonial systems within the housing sector that do not properly support Indigenous clients and can contribute to re-traumatization.

Housing supply. Participants often mentioned that there is not enough affordable housing that meets the needs of clients, including barrier-free housing for those with physical disabilities, long-term supportive housing with adequate-wrap around supports (including health and medical supports when necessary), and housing that is suitable for large or multi-generational families. This contributes to long wait times, particularly regarding supportive housing when clients are often in the most need.

Affordability. In addition to the lack of affordable housing supply, financial barriers such as high rents, lack of good credit, insufficient income supports, and stagnant incomes that do not meet the rising cost of living were often mentioned. The need for landlord regulations, with slum lords and unattainable rent standards were also cited as issues.

Transitional support. Attendees felt there is not enough transitional support in the in-between stages from houselessness to market housing. Key areas of concern were clients not having a safe, stable place to go after incarceration, after hospitalization, and after detox, ultimately contributing to an ongoing cycle of houselessness. Another common concern was a lack of skills training that could set clients up for success as they move into market housing. Bridge housing was seen as one good approach to this, though some noted that the waitlists and time limits were a challenge.

Disconnection from community and culture. It was noted that the system often requires clients to leave their existing community and cultural supports in order to access the services they need. Sometimes, that means a person may make the difficult choice to stay homeless.

Coordination and collaboration. A common priority was establishing effective collaboration among the different organizations, government agencies and non-profits in the housing sector to achieve common goals. Participants felt that competing priorities and a lack of alignment across systems results in scattered resources, inequitable financial support, and confusion and frustration with the system. There was feedback that non-profits are taking on the burden and responsibility of the sector without adequate support from governments, the corporate sector and major institutions.

Station 2: Creating a More Aligned and Effective Sector

STATION PURPOSE: The second station encouraged people to think about the ways the sector could work together better. They were asked questions about what successful collaboration looks like, what is getting in the way of collaboration, how organizations can better align to make more effective use of their resources to house people, and what best practice looks like in measuring the impact and effectiveness of those efforts. Below are some of the ideas and barriers participants identified.

Reduce competition. The most prevalent response in this section had to do with competition for funding, which is seen as a symptom of the current funding model. There is a sense that everyone is fighting for the same pot of money, which dismantles existing relationships and creates an environment where collaboration is less likely. That sense of resource scarcity makes it difficult to innovate and suggests that changes are

required to foster a culture that moves away from competition, making sector resources available to everyone so the available funds can have a greater impact.

More aligned policies between EPS, health, and housing. Some participants identified a need for greater alignment between the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and housing as well as Alberta Health Services (AHS) and housing. Programs like Human-centred Engagement and Liaison Partnership (HELP) and the Jasper Place Wellness Centre (JPWC) collaboration with AHS were seen as positive steps, but there are still some disconnects that make the housing sector's work more difficult. EPS's response to encampments was noted as especially challenging, as tearing down encampments erodes trust and makes it difficult to keep track of clients. Participants felt more work needs to be done to create a collaborative, streamlined, supportive approach.

Shared database. A common insight was a desire for a shared database that anyone working with clients in the sector could access. Currently, service providers often lack critical information that could help serve clients better, faster, and with less overhead. The By-Name-List and Coordinated Access were seen as good starts. Greater shared data would allow service providers and frontline workers to collaborate on caseloads, and it would reduce clients' frustration in having to start over and reshare sometimes traumatizing information at multiple contact points. Participants mentioned that helpful data points could include vacancies, available services, client risk factors, what services a client has accessed, their housing status and history, and critical medical information. On that note, accountability, confidentiality, and ethical data use were also identified as a critical component to this. Participants also said that greater shared data would allow the sector to better report on and understand the full scope of houselessness in the region.

Best practices and aligned goals. Participants mentioned a need to establish a standard of practice across the sector to align on values and work together toward common goals. There were mentions of competing priorities, especially when it comes to abstinence from substances versus harm reduction, and in relation to faith based or colonial approaches. In addition, there was a desire for an aligned and cohesive method of measuring success to ensure those common goals are being achieved. Ideas for data points included measuring public health indicators, mental wellbeing, how long an individual stays housed, emergency room visits, length of time to connect to a service, diversion, and awareness of programs.

Sharing resources and expertise. Participants recognized that organizations and the staff within them have skills, specialties, established relationships, and areas of focus, but they are often working in silos. This is particularly challenging when staff turnover is high and knowledge, networks, ideas, and relationships are not adequately handed off. Ideas included establishing regular meetings, connector hubs, group training, newsletters, and other systems that allow multiple programs to work together, reduce overlap, and maximize expertise.

Make funding sustainable and predictable based on existing success.. Some participants noted that the funding structure tends to favour projects and pilots, rather than providing sustainable funding that ensures staff are paid adequately and existing successful approaches can continue. This challenge can result in mission creep or mission drift for organizations; they develop programs to respond to proposed funding rather than allocating funding based on organizational priorities and strengths.

"Inner circle" problem. Some participants felt like there is an "inner circle" made of larger organizations that hold power and are not open to smaller organizations' ideas. Some identified that they do not feel heard when sharing their needs and opinions, and that there are often egos at play contributing to that. However, some also mentioned that engagements like this one are a good opportunity to speak freely in a safe environment. Participants felt that facilitating more open communication would encourage all the organizations in the city to come together and collectively plan for the betterment of the community and the sector.

Station 3: Strengths and Opportunities

STATION PURPOSE: The goal of Station 3 was to identify where the strengths and opportunities lie in this sector, both locally and on a broader social scale. Participants had an opportunity to answer questions about what is working well to get people housed today, what they've seen that's been working well elsewhere in the world, and what the system here should stop doing. Below are some themes about what seems to be working, and what could be improved upon.

Harm reduction works. The most consistent feedback in this station was that harm reduction works to house and keep clients housed. The success of the decriminalization of drugs in Portugal was cited as an example and the need for more safe supply and drug testing, drug test strips, safe consumption sites, nurses on staff, and 24/7 wrap around supports was emphasized throughout the session.

Transitional and supportive housing works. Although it was identified that there is not enough housing in this sector, bridge housing, supportive housing, and housing first are models that participants see to be working, if limited. Some adjustments were suggested, especially regarding timelines, placements, and requirements to access, but generally participants felt positive about investing in programs like this to continue improving them.

Outreach and peer models are working. The importance of work by sector frontline staff was repeatedly mentioned, as well as that outreach is one of the most successful ways to help people access the services they need. A need for more training to ensure all housing workers have the skills required for the complexity of work they do, and also a desire for more programs to be created and delivered by peer support workers was also emphasized. Outreach activities and face to face contact with peer support workers builds relationships and trust and reduces the instances of no-shows when clients cannot get to appointments.

Stop putting timelines on success. The time limits on certain programs, like Housing First and Bridge Housing, are not always enough for the clients to be successful long-term. There was a noted need for a person-centred approach that's flexible to clients' needs.

Stop punishing poverty, addiction, and mental health. Participants mentioned the ongoing cycle of incarceration to homelessness, and that criminality associated with homelessness (such as loitering and substance use) should instead be addressed in a way that does not further perpetuate that cycle. Programs like 24/7 Crisis Diversion were cited as better alternatives to police intervention.

The SPDAT score isn't accurate. The SPDAT score was mentioned several times as being insufficient. It is not seen as accurate and sets people up for failure, often making clients look ready when in reality they need more support. Despite this, many participants still understood the need for evaluation, but that a person-centred approach would be ideal.

More variety is needed. Although participants noted that there are many programs that are working well in this sector, they also mentioned a need for more housing options that suit complex or unique individual needs of the community. Many examples were given, including subsidized housing, mixed income housing and sliding-scale rent, money for social housing (in reference to Helsinki), container homes, micro housing (in reference to London, Ontario), community-led housing (in reference to CANAVUA), community-based housing like co-ops or single-room occupancy housing (SROs), and supportive housing for seniors.

Station 4: Inclusion

STATION PURPOSE: In Station 4, participants were asked to think about those who are being left out when it comes to the solutions the sector has developed, as well as the barriers and how we could include them in the future. This provided insights into who is slipping through the cracks and how the new Community Plan might be able to address those gaps. Participants were asked about the most persistent issues in access to

housing, how we can collect and apply lived experience, and how we can shift our programs and practices to support equity-deserving communities in accessing housing.

Many groups are still left out. When it comes to the people not being adequately served in this sector, seniors, youth, people with physical disabilities, large families, newcomers, refugees, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities were mentioned the most. Indigenous populations were also mentioned, particularly with regards to the colonial nature of the services available.

Cost is a primary barrier. When it comes to folks being left out of the housing market, cost was frequently referenced as being the primary barrier, no matter the group. Challenges around upfront costs, availability of affordable housing, cost of living, landlords not accepting third party rental payments, and slumlord behaviour were mentioned as key issues. The need for landlord regulations and rent control were repeatedly brought up, especially to protect those who have found housing that works for them and do not want to leave.

A lack of appropriate housing. There is not enough appropriate housing for the variety of needs in the community. Barrier free housing, social housing, affordable housing, and housing suitable for large or multigenerational families were mentioned as gaps. A lack of choice in terms of location was also mentioned, with clients often having to relocate to inconvenient, undesirable, or unsafe areas to access housing. In some cases, this results in clients becoming segregated from their community, family, culture, and natural supports.

Stigma and discrimination. Participant experience shows that some landlords seem to discriminate against those experiencing houselessness, and withhold services or set unrealistic expectations based on assumptions around addiction, gang involvement, criminal records, and bad credit scores. There were discussions around landlords needing regulations, but also better supports to reduce the risk they take on.

Lack of basic skills. A lack of life skills as a barrier to sustained housing was a clear theme. Cleaning, basic maintenance, guest management, how to pay bills, how to access subsidies, and even the process of meeting with a landlord were all referenced as common gaps that are not adequately addressed. Clients making a mistake can result in delays, mistrust, and evictions.

Lived and living experience. Participants emphasized the importance of lived and living experience in the context of inclusion, allowing minority, equity-deserving, and commonly excluded groups to develop and guide programs that suit their needs. Ideas included leaning on case workers to determine who is in a place to share and hiring those with lived experience to design the services in this sector.

The importance of building trust. Incorporating lived experience is important, but is only as good as the system's ability to act on it. A common theme was that those with lived or living experience do not always feel listened to or that their time and insights are respected when they are engaged, particularly when they don't see changes made that reflect their feedback. Participants noted that those with lived experience can feel complicit, tokenized, and even exploited if they do not see change, and this erodes trust and efficacy of the system. There is a need to show the community the impact of their efforts and how their conversations were incorporated; however, this needs to steer clear of being interpreted as using people's trauma for persuasive means. As well, the input yielded an identified need to provide safe spaces and dignified compensation for their time that is in line with the value being provided (e.g., more than a $5 gift card). By building this trust, conversations will be more robust, rather than simply transactional, which will lead to richer insights that can build a more effective sector based on the contributions of those with lived and living experience.

Station 5: Issues

STATION PURPOSE: In Station 5, participants were asked questions related to the 10 summary papers they were provided in the Inform Station. These papers were provided again at Station 5 and were also embedded in the digital survey for reference. These 10 issues were chosen based on their current alignment with the houselessness conversation in our region, though the project team acknowledges that there are many other issues in this dynamic. Participants were given the chance to provide feedback on any or all of these issues, depending on their interest and comfort level. The same three questions were asked about each issue, which are listed below.

ISSUE: Drug Policy

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?	
- Harm reduction policies – safe supply, safe consumption, naloxone - Supportive housing - Housing First and Bridge incorporate effective harm reduction approaches - On-site health care	
Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: **[no themes to report here]**	**Social Changes:** Society needs more education on harm reduction and its benefits
Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: - More training for landlords, home care, more drug checking - More myth busting	**If nothing changes:** - More misinformation and disinformation - More overdoses and death, more encampments

ISSUE: Drug Treatment and Harm Reduction

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?	
- Harm reduction works *[Note: a couple responses about harm reduction identified that this approach doesn't work for everyone, and can keep people in place]* - Collaboration between housing sector and addiction service agencies - Recognition within the front-line sector that recovery follows a continuum, allowing individuals the autonomy to chart their unique path forward - Trauma informed approach to substance use - Housing first works	
Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: - More treatment and detox spaces - A greater focus on harm reduction - Improve accessibility of treatment - Bring treatment to the individual rather than making them go to outpatient treatment	**Social Changes:** - There's a sense of distrust in the government's idea of recovery - Educate the public that harm reduction works

Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: ● More training for landlords ● More home care ● More drug checking	**If nothing changes:** ● There's an expectation that legislation will force people into treatment, which is seen largely as a negative ● More overdoses and death ● Continued encampments

ISSUE: Encampments

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● Targeted outreach efforts work ● Encampments create a sense of community, self-efficacy, and safety in numbers, seen as the community's way of solving the problem

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: ● Increase indigenous-led shelter options and Land-based programming ● Increase stabilized housing options and transitional supports ● Stop emergency shelters, which can be unsafe ● Stop displacing people without a strategy to find them alternative shelter, safety, and supports ● Very hard to locate people when encampments are torn down ● Bring more support services to encampments – home care, addiction care, pharmacy, etc. ● Time limit on Bridge / transitional housing is an issue	**Social Changes:** ● Correcting misunderstanding of what is actually dangerous, and working with the community to mitigate those risks – ex. fire safety, how to keep yourself safe, resources to call, addressing gangs ● Derogatory media coverage and lack of understanding adding to NIMBY attitudes and harmful government policies
Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: ● Safe and dignified transitional housing ● Include lived and living experience to help build the strategy ● More work to address the reasons people don't want to go to a shelter	**If nothing changes:** ● As encampments get pushed out of the core, social disorder rises in other areas. This will put additional strain on already stretched outreach teams ● More encampments will pop up, violence and disorder continues

ISSUE: Housing Supply and Affordability

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● Supports and controls, such as rental assistance, HomeEd, Civida ● Mandates that housing only be 30% of a person's income ● Funding for affordable and social housing ● Health care support model

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: ● Build 30% of household income model ● Need for more affordable housing to be built ● Reduce long wait times – Civida and other subsidized programs have significant wait lists, and application processes take time ● The risk for small-scale landlords is too high ● Extend the 90-day Bridge housing time limit	**Social Changes:** ● Education for tenants to better understand their rights and the systems ● Need to address poverty at its root

Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: ● Push for government to fund more low-rent, affordable housing ● More barrier-free, affordable, accessible housing ● City should offer cheaper and more accessible land	**If nothing changes:** ● If we don't address the root causes, the cycle of bottlenecking and housing loss will continue

ISSUE: Housing First

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● Meets people where they're at and allows them to address basic needs and work on other issues in a safe way – takes people out of crisis ● An effective, evidence-based practice ● When the wrap around supports are good, housing first is very effective and can change lives ● Growing collaboration in this area

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: ● Needs a person-centred approach to deal with more complex needs and higher acuity clients ● Longer-term support worker connection is required ● Need to change the idea of "chronic" houselessness and being "homeless enough" to access the program ● Extend the 1-year time limit ● Fix the disconnect between costs, subsidies, and income supports (ex. Can't provide rental assistance to people on AISH, people on Alberta Supports don't get enough to cover rent) ● Supported housing should be required first to make sure they know how to live on their own before moving them to market housing. Will help with landlord relationships, repair costs, etc. ● Reliance on market housing is an issue – relies on benevolence of landlords who don't always feel supported / have the funds to maintain, repair units	**Social Changes:** ● Need to increase overall public awareness, but not necessarily through public engagement or consultation

Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: ● Increase funding and trained personnel, including peer support workers to see long-term success ● Follow through with the data on how many people stay housed after they've graduated from Housing First ● More supportive housing with nursing and mental health on site ● Updated poverty line and minimum wage ● More media coverage of good news stories, ● More funding from Provincial and Federal Governments for Housing First	**If nothing changes:** ● Loss of landlords willing to participate ● Without changes, the cycle of housing > homelessness > repeat will continue

ISSUE: Indigenous Houselessness

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● Improvements are being made with involving Indigenous leaders and experts in the housing sector ● There is a better understanding about systemic racism, generational trauma amongst the sector ● Funding Indigenous agencies to create and build Indigenous housing works

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: ● More funding for Indigenous-led services and housing ● Need to provide different housing options for those who don't want to live in a typical single occupancy apartment–housing that builds community ● Need better resources to connect Indigenous people back to their communities and families ● Avoid tokenism and incorporate Indigenous leadership, approaches, and healing	**Social Changes:** ● Reporting standards and data collection systems generally need to be decolonized

Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: ● Stop funding emergency shelters and create transitional housing instead ● Indigenous programs and nations lead the way and colonial organizations step aside	**If nothing changes:** ● If we don't interrupt the cycles of houselessness and intergenerational trauma we continue to perpetuate systems of violence ● If nothing changes, we'll see the continuation of generational trauma, disconnect from community, and reduction of life expectancy for Indigenous folks

ISSUE: Houselessness and the Health Care System

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
- Collaborations work well - JPWC and AHS, HELP, Police and Crisis Response Team (PACT), Community Outreach Transit Team (COTT) were mentioned   - Alberta Supports healthcare benefits   - There is a growing understanding of the need for specialized housing in the context of health care   - Health services built into the housing

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: - Need for temporary or transitional housing for those awaiting medical procedures, and for those being discharged - Increase in mobile and outreach healthcare services - Additional funding for preventative healthcare - Logistics are a barrier - Paperwork for referrals, transportation, health literacy, systems navigation	**Social Changes:** Need to address medical racism and discrimination

Q3: What's next on this issue?	
Hopeful: - Expanding trained mental health peer workers in healthcare settings - Better transitioning from medical to housing - Housing has embedded healthcare supports	**If nothing changes:** As needs become more complex, health conditions become more dire

ISSUE: Houselessness and the Justice System

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
- Integrated response teams – HELP, Integrated Offender Management (IOM), Y:FIVE-O   - Peer mentoring transitional program in the federal system   - Drug court and mental health court are working well   - Alberta Works (Alberta Supports) collaboration

Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach?	
Sector Changes: - Need better release planning and housing first programs integrated into the discharge program - The Corrections and Conditional Release Act outlines guidelines regarding incarcerated Indigenous peoples' release; however, the justice system continually releases Indigenous people into houselessness - Decriminalize poverty (using drugs, loitering, using parks)- the fine system is a pathway to incarceration	**Social Changes:** Police seen to lack compassion, understanding of trauma and culture, and de-escalation skills

| Provide bail housing / Loss of access to bank accounts, AISH, Alberta Works/Supports when incarcerated | |

| Q3: What's next on this issue? | |
| **Hopeful:** Address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in jail Make space for Indigenous led courtrooms and systems | **If nothing changes:** Cycle of arrest, incarcerate, release, houselessness will continue |

ISSUE: Rental Assistance

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● Rental Assistance helps, but it is not seen as a magic bullet for all cases

| Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach? | |
| **Sector Changes:** Fund more public housing Supporting rental assistance requires more flexibility and fewer time restrictions | **Social Changes:** Living wage / universal basic income |

| Q3: What's next on this issue? |
| **Hopeful:** Reformed income support and rental assistance will help reduce homelessness |

ISSUE: Youth Houselessness

Q1: What's working on addressing this issue in the context of housing?
● There are great programs and specific housing teams that work with youth, but not enough

| Q2: What does our sector and system need to change about our approach? | |
| **Sector Changes:** Better transitional housing and support for youth aging out of care, including education about living independently and general life skills – Need to change the expectation that when someone turns 18, they know how to be an adult, navigate those systems Stop releasing youth from Edmonton Young Offender Centre (EYOC) into homelessness Need more funding for youth housing and supports Lack of rural / small town supports – youth have to come into the city, leave their families, have nowhere to stay | **Social Changes:** Need to recognize 2SLGBTQ+ intersectionality and their unique challenges Better understanding of hidden houselessness for youth is significant with this group – sleeping in lobbies, precarious housing |

Q3: What's next on this issue?
If nothing changes: ● Other systems feel more pressure ● More gang involvement ● Hidden houselessness grows

Station 6: Issues to Explore, Things We Missed, and Final Thoughts

STATION PURPOSE: In the last stages of the engagement, participants were asked to identify issues they felt were missed in the session, as well as any final thoughts or essential messages they wanted understood. This is a summary of those thoughts.

Housing Supply
- Supply shortage and funding for housing, shelter beds, and supports that meet the needs of community
- Explore the options on the spectrum between market housing and supportive housing
- Stop the commodification of housing
- Landlords need certification, education, and to repair the relationship with housing first

Sector Priorities
- Need better ways to assess and prioritize individuals' needs
- Do more engagements, events, meetings to connect agencies and organizations and increase collaboration and learning, balanced with demands on front-line staff
- Need better data to capture the housing journey
- Need for immediate action and long-term solutions

Staffing
- Sector staff and front-line workers are doing great work, but they need more support and better pay
- Peer support works, and there needs to be more of it

Public Attitudes
- Addressing stigma, NIMBY attitudes, and generally educating the public are key

Inclusivity
- More consideration of intersectionality and other marginalized groups, including seniors, 2SLGBTA+, Somali community, newcomers, refugees, people with disabilities, domestic violence
- Need for trauma-informed, Indigenous-led programs and systems

Funding
- More funding is required generally
- A funding model that does not encourage competition is critical
- Need for more support from the provincial government

Safety and Security
- Community safety and neighbourhood social disorder need to be addressed
- Harm reduction, mental health, addictions, and support for high acuity clients need to be aligned

Next Steps

Throughout this engagement, whether in person or online, participants' passion for the work they do and the clients they serve was abundant. Thank you to everyone who took the time to share such important feedback and for your continued dedication to solving homelessness in our region. There are many insightful ideas within this feedback that the project team will be considering in future engagement and in the creation of the Community Plan itself.

Further Engagement

The project team will be engaging in follow-up interviews with organizations and service providers in this sector to glean more in-depth and specific recommendations, as well as examining more sector-level data, governance structures, and other crucial sources.

Considering the insights identified in this session, some of the questions the project team will seek to answer in continued engagements may include:
- How can we prioritize the recommendations found in this feedback?
- How might different levels of government support these priorities?
- What might a new funding model look like?
- What are the practical next steps on improving collaboration within the sector?
- How can we ensure accountability?

Development of the Community Plan

Following the final stages of engagement, the project team will develop the new draft Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness that will define new and ongoing commitments, accountabilities, and actions that our sector and community will take to prevent and end homelessness in Edmonton.

The Community Plan will incorporate insights gathered throughout all the engagements, as well as data and best practices from our region and from other areas that have been successful in this work. The draft will be refined with further consultation with stakeholders and service providers in the sector.

Once finalized, in Spring 2024, the New Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness will be presented to the public and to City Council.

Following Council's approval, the Community Plan will be operationalized within the sector. More details to come in the new year.