

Recover Urban Wellness

A Culture Shift for Wellbeing

Recommendation

That the December 2, 2020, Citizen Services report CS00107, be received for information.

Executive Summary

In 2018, City Council approved four years of funding for RECOVER to focus on improving urban wellness in six neighbourhoods. After three years of research and engaging people in designing and testing prototypes, RECOVER's new Well-being Framework emphasizes that well-being is about individuals feeling respect, belonging, balance in life, and connection to each other, family, community, the earth, our ancestors, and future generations. As a result, RECOVER has shifted from evaluation that measures change at the community or population level to one that also includes individual outcomes.

RECOVER has set out to both shape how our institutions think about wellness and nurture novel opportunities for communities to engage in this collective pursuit. Moving towards urban wellness requires systemic change to the underlying beliefs that structure how we help and care for each other. The research has exposed that the quality of our relationships is as important as the quantity of provided services.

Report

People experiencing poverty and without stable housing are often referred to as vulnerable or marginalized people. Governments, agencies, volunteers and charities contribute to improving marginalized peoples' lives with a focus on getting them housing, food and other needed support.

Between 2017 to 2019, researchers got to know 59 marginalized people in Edmonton, learning about their stressors and pain points as well as their motivations and aspirations. When the researchers asked what matters most in terms of living and being well, the ideas that stood out were a sense of purpose, a feeling of respect, a sense of connection as well as safety and security. Indigenous people included in the research often identified respect as something that matters most to them. For all 59 people, they consistently saw their lives needing purpose and connection. This research was consistent with the literature review that explored Indigenous, Eastern,

Western, and contemporary interdisciplinary traditions around living well. Across almost all the traditions, wellness was about things like love, harmony, and balance.

RECOVER's work has led to the understanding that wellness is about relationships and connection both within and beyond self. At the heart of RECOVER's Well-being Framework (Attachment 1) are targeted outcomes based on six kinds of connection:

1. to land and ground
2. to body and self
3. to family, friends and community;
4. to the sacred (however one defines it)
5. to culture
6. to the human project (one's ability to grow and develop; realize their potential)

Underpinning RECOVER's approach is a commitment to decolonization and reconciliation through Two-Eyed Seeing, "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together". RECOVER is about learning together and creating meaning alongside Indigenous communities and continually reflecting on how to work, who to work with, and how to understand success, as primarily settler people. RECOVER aims to create spaces that promote both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing as whole, separate, but not at odds with one another. RECOVER recognizes that this work takes work and acknowledges that this journey will be a long and winding one.

Applying the Well-being Framework

With this understanding of what connections promote well-being, the framework can be used to design and test a new intervention or practice targeted towards strengthening one or several of these well-being outcomes. By focusing on people with lived experience, using research and empathy to get insight into what can be meaningfully done to help improve their well-being, as well as the systems that get in the way of that. This process of researching, designing small practices, testing them and then evaluating is called prototyping. The primary output of a prototype is a documented and shareable learning. Through experimentation, participants better understand the opportunity to intervene and have impact, including specifics, such as what kind of interactions are effective for whom and under what circumstances.

RECOVER is currently supporting a variety of prototypes. For example, RECOVER is partnering with Edmonton Police Service on a prototype led by REACH and InWithForward. The prototype is testing ways to connect marginalized individuals to sources of healing and build authentic relationships in community, recognizing that the current crisis response and triage approach does not get at the root causes of dislocation and marginalization.

Understanding Impact

In 2018, RECOVER set out to measure impact using five indicator categories, closely related to the social determinants of health. A subset of three were selected to measure progress as they were deemed most important. These measures were:

- Social Capacity Index - a measure of citizen connectedness, engagement, and inclusion, drawn from the Citizen Perception Survey.
- Social Vulnerability Index - a composite measure of nine elements commonly associated with neighbourhood vulnerability, such as unemployment rate, low income, lone parent families, and home ownership.
- Safety Perception Index - a measure of citizens' feelings of safety.

The indicator categories measure change at the community or population level. RECOVER measured these but has not been able to re-measure as the data sources have not been updated since 2018. More importantly, RECOVER understands that these measures do not reflect the evolved understanding of well-being. There are four key insights that have emerged related to evaluation (Attachment 2).

1. The RECOVER activities/prototypes have generated recognized value.
2. The RECOVER approach requires time to make an impact.
3. The RECOVER approach can contribute to - but not drive - changes in well-being at the community or population level.
4. The participants of the RECOVER process have concluded that their framing and indicators of well-being needed to evolve.

Based on the Well-being Framework, RECOVER has moved to align its evaluation focus to individual outcomes, as opposed to the community or population level, as well as capturing the experiences of people focused on improving individual well-being and community wellness.

Key Directions for the Future of RECOVER

RECOVER aligns with ConnectEdmonton's strategic goal of Healthy City; the Inclusive and Compassionate big city move; and the direction that Edmontonians foster wellness and mental health by providing opportunities for all people to engage in community life and supporting those who are isolated, marginalized or at risk.

RECOVER offers a way to respond beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, incorporating a fuller understanding of well-being by:

- researching, designing and testing ideas (prototyping) and learning how to meaningfully impact the six kinds of connection
- pursuing partnerships to share in the cost of doing this well-being work and learning together (e.g., EPS, REACH, McConnell Foundation)
- assisting post-secondary professors who are using the well-being information in their course work

- collaborating with external partners and advisors who are members of the RECOVER Catalyst Group

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmontonians are connected to the city in which they live, work and play.			
Outcome	Measures	Results	Targets
Improved understanding of when to intervene and what are the most impactful interactions to improve wellbeing	Number of Prototypes tested	2018: 13 2019: 13	2021: 3-5
	Social Capacity Index	2019 - data not available 2018 - 64.84% 2017 - 67.59%	n/a

Attachments

1. RECOVER’s Well-being Framework
2. Key Evaluation Insights

Others Reviewing this Report

- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor