

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Original Signed by 

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Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** November 22, 2022

**SUBJECT:** **Lived Experience Committee and Consultation**

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## **ORIGIN**

August 31, 2021, Regional Council motion (item 14.3) MOVED by Councillor Lovelace, seconded by Councillor Kent

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report and recommendations with respect to the establishment of a "Lived Experience Advisory Committee on Homelessness for HRM" designed collaboratively with community partners. This report and recommendations must be based on the principle that systemic problems need systemic solutions inclusive of those most impacted by homelessness and include provisions that would make training opportunities available to Halifax Regional Municipality staff and Regional Council on the impacts of mental health, addictions, and trauma.

## **MOTION AS AMENDED PUT AND PASSED**

May 3, 2022, Regional Council motion (item 15.1.9) MOVED by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Stoddard

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to continue to support the Province and other partners to ensure individuals have safe, supportive and affordable housing,
5. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to negotiate and enter into a contribution agreement with the United Way to convene a lived experience committee to advise staff, and
6. Direct the CAO to return to Council with a subsequent report with a subsequent report with a subsequent report with additional analysis and recommendations for actions, including a timeline and plan for supporting the transition of people, education, and implementation that is lead and delivered by civilian staff.
7. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to provide a staff report on negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province of Nova Scotia on supporting Unsheltered Residents of HRM. The report should include defining the roles of each order of government and specific actions to support and prevent homelessness within HRM.

## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39 provides:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to ...

- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
- (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities

Halifax Regional Municipality By-Law P-600 *Respecting Municipal Parks*

Camping

- 8. (1) Camping is prohibited in a park unless otherwise posted or by permission.
- (2) No person shall erect or place in a park anything for the purpose of temporary or permanent accommodation without permission.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:

- 1. continue to seek lived experience expertise from those living in encampments to guide municipal work to address homelessness and its impacts; and
- 2. respond to the recommendations of the HRM Lived Experience Consultation Report with additional analysis as part of the broader report on HRM's approach to homelessness which staff are preparing.

## **BACKGROUND**

In recent years, in response to growing levels of homelessness, the Halifax Regional Municipality has committed significant resources to address the needs of persons experiencing homelessness. These efforts include constructing two modular housing sites which provide shelter for 64 individuals, additional support for street navigators and outreach workers, and designation of camping sites for the purpose of sheltering within the municipality, along with supports such as water delivery, porta-potties, and garbage collection.

Providing housing and shelter is a provincial responsibility. Between 1995 and 1996, a service exchange process transferred various roles and responsibilities between municipalities and the Province of Nova Scotia (PNS). PNS assumed responsibility for social services, including affordable housing and child welfare, nursing homes, and homes for the elderly. Municipalities, in turn, were required to contribute to the PNS for education, social housing, and corrections.

At the core of our community's homelessness crisis are issues such as the lack of affordable and supportive housing stock and wrap-around services - which are provincial responsibilities to address.

As the municipality strives to help those experiencing homelessness, its goal is for every resident to have a safe, supportive, and sustainable home. All homes should be purposely constructed for long-term human habitation, built to safety codes and standards, and be in a suitable location based on municipal planning strategies.

## **Lived Experience Committee**

As shared in previous presentations, staff have adopted a series of principles to guide them in this work. The first of these principles is that we will seek to engage people in decisions that will impact their life. The best experts in homelessness – and the needs of those experiencing it – are those who have been and are homeless. The experiences of municipal staff in addressing the needs of this community reinforces the need for ongoing input from those we are trying to help.

Regional Council directed that a lived experience committee be established to advise staff. The municipality contracted the United Way Halifax to undertake this work and the researchers have completed the first round of engagement and prepared the HRM Lived Experience Consultation Report (Attachment A).

While described as a committee, given the circumstances and experiences of those experiencing homelessness, the engagement was not structured as a typical committee, (e.g., with recurring meetings in meeting rooms). To be effective, the consultation was designed to be, and feel, safe for participants and was conducted in settings that people are familiar with and comfortable in. It was conducted individually or in small groups and took time to work through. Participants were compensated for their time, and supports such as food, if done over a mealtime, or childcare were also made available if needed. Participants were recruited through the existing homeless encampments within the municipality, including both designated and non-designated outdoor sheltering locations.

Participants were asked a total of 29 questions; listed in the attached report. The questions focused on several key themes, including how people became homeless, where they were sheltering and why, where they get support, concerns about safety, thoughts on policing, and what could improve their situation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The focus of responses was not just on the role of the municipality. For many people experiencing homelessness, who is providing services and support does not matter to them. The researchers took the feedback and recommendations from those experiencing homelessness and themed them. The report and recommendations reflect feedback from those experiencing homelessness, as well as the analysis of the consultants based on that feedback, and feedback from sessions with service providers and staff. The recommendations apply to the municipality, the provincial government, service providers, and community members.

The researchers also included an overview of homeless encampment approaches from select cities.

Recommendations specifically related to encampments include:

- That not-for-profits actively participate in inter-agency collaborations and partnerships which are solution based and action oriented.
- Work with Mainline and other harm-reduction agencies to develop a safer drug use strategy at the encampment locations, which could create an alternative to using the bathrooms, and explore the feasibility of designated sober locations.
- The addition of multiple small and scattered designated sites across the municipality with consideration of proximity to food, payphones, public washrooms, and community resources, such as libraries and community resources.
- The re-introduction of the Halifax Report Card on Homelessness to set benchmarks for, and evaluate success of, ongoing efforts on an annual basis.
- Investment in and installation of secure, weather-proofed crisis shelters with a small power supply (such as the WELL Engineered ones) to replace all the existing Tyveks<sup>1</sup> and new ones at all the existing designated locations.
- The Province of Nova Scotia increase level and amount of unrestricted funding that non-profits can use responsively based on the growing number and diverse needs of unsheltered people.

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<sup>1</sup> Hard sided structures used as emergency shelters.

- The municipality and the province co-fund an encampment coordinator position that is housed with HRM and works in collaboration with an intervention team comprised of service providers and first responders, to ensure basic needs and safety at all encampment locations. This may include food and supply distribution, property management, and addressing direct safety concerns.

Staff will use the HRM Lived Experience Consultation Report to inform future work and will bring forward strategic and operational recommendations in a future report to the Regional Council. This work will incorporate ongoing engagement and consultation with those who have lived experience of homelessness.

While the ongoing value of lived experience expertise cannot be understated and the report provides recommendations around continuing this work, the researchers included an important perspective on this initiative.

In Halifax, the engagement between people sleeping at the encampments [and] service providers are disconnected, individualized, and predominantly survival based. Unless a coordinated approach can be developed to address people's basic needs, it will be difficult, perhaps even unethical, to ask people to engage in community development committees and processes when they are unsheltered, hungry, and in a state of constant fear for their safety.

Going forward the municipality is committed to work with the province and service providers in a more coordinated fashion to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts to help those experiencing homelessness. As homelessness impacts many in different ways, we also will continue to work on this through a diverse, inclusive and equitable lens. This fall municipal staff have launched an initiative to bring these groups together to find opportunities to work better together. Furthermore, the municipality intends to work more closely with others seeking lived experience expertise so that it can be coordinated, and the learnings can be shared as broadly as possible.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications at this time.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

There are no risks for consideration at this time.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

There was targeted community engagement in the development of this report, specifically through consultation with those experiencing homelessness.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Regional Council could direct the CAO to engage differently with those experiencing homelessness or not to engage directly with those experiencing homelessness.
2. Regional Council may direct the CAO to not to return to Council with the broader report.

**ATTACHMENT**

Attachment A – HRM Lived Experience Consultation Report

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

Report Prepared by: Max Chauvin, Special Projects Manager Parks & Recreation 902.456-7420

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 HRM LIVED EXPERIENCE CONSULTATION
 

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*In August 2022, the United Way of Greater Halifax commissioned a consultation with unhoused people sheltering in parks and encampments in Halifax and Dartmouth on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality. The consultation was carried out as an independent project of Eric Jonsson (Downtown Halifax Street Navigator Program) and Charlene Gagnon (YWCA Halifax).*

*The sample included 16 people who were sleeping rough in Halifax (10) and Dartmouth (6). At the time people were interviewed 14 were staying in an encampment area and 2 were camping in isolated wooded areas. Six were sleeping in a Tyvek (Mutual Aid Shelter), 9 were sleeping in tents, and one was sleeping open air. We talked to 11 men; 3 women; and 2 transgender individuals ranging in age from 23-61. It is worth noting that all 3 female identified people we talked to were coupled. Due to a lack of presence in the encampments, no one who identified as African Nova Scotian was interviewed; 12 identified as white; 4 identified as indigenous.*

## Key Points

- Encampments are a necessary band-aid strategy, but **NOT** a solution to homelessness –people told us they did that they did not think the current strategies to deal with homelessness were working, and that they want to be housed and not sheltering in tents or public spaces
- Unhoused people are citizens of HRM who have a basic democratic **human right** to be heard and represented by all elected officials. The people we talked to did not feel like they were valued as community members and were skeptical that their voices would be heard.
- People’s pathways to and experiences in homelessness are **diverse**, individualized, and complex – there is not a single stereotype of a “homeless person” or common set of circumstances for their homelessness.
- People have different reasons for choosing the locations they are sheltering – this “**choice**”<sup>1</sup> was largely related to convenience, community, and safety. The locations they chose were usually in proximity to where they were getting their basic needs filled.
- People’s prioritized needs are related to the **basics** - access to food, water, protection from the elements, a place to use the washroom, and a safe place to sleep. Most are accessing services and resources in a disconnected way from a variety of people and places, however no one in the sample were getting all these basic needs filled.
- Unhoused people are highly **stigmatized**, and intersecting factors of race, gender and age increase this stigma and impact a person’s vulnerability. People told us that they faced harassment from police and other community members simply because they were homeless.
- The crisis shelters (Tyveks) enhance people’s **safety/security** and are better options than tents. Even though there were many reports of disrepair and discomfort due to design limitations and flaws, the people staying in the Tyveks valued being able to lock their door and secure their belongings while they were away. These crisis shelters are now being passed on organically through the community and are predominantly used by lower acuity people. Both couples we talked to were in Tyveks.
- People reported positive and negative interactions with police and the defining feature of those positive interactions were **respect** and compassion from individual officers. Where there were negative interactions, it was for things related to feeling not taken seriously, disrespected and/or harassed.

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<sup>1</sup> Choice from the world’s [REDACTED] buffet.

# Recommendations

*These recommendations were developed through a collaborative analysis process with a series of 5 sessions with non-profit staff providing direct services to the population and HRM staff. They also reflect existing work being done through the recently struck Inter-Agency Task Force with representatives from grassroots collectives, non-profit (executive and direct service providers), HRM and The Nova Scotia Department of Community Service. Every recommendation is connected to one of the key points and reflects the collective responsibility we share on responding to the homeless crisis in HRM today.*

## **Community at Large**

*Homelessness is a community issue that directly affects everyone. The community at-large includes neighbors of the encampments, schools, volunteers, and the public.*

- 1. Awareness about the impacts of stigma**
- 2. Empathy for people's situation and struggle**
- 3. Respect for people's privacy and belongings**

## **Non-Profits**

*Non-profits are the flow through of funding for social services from the government to the community. These recommendations are for non-profit organizations that receive funding to support and provide services to the homeless population.*

- 4. Prioritization of culturally specific supports**
- 5. Expertise-sharing with government, police, and private sector landlords**
- 6. Ongoing evaluation of programs and services**

## **Municipal Government**

*The Municipal Government makes decisions on land-use, by-laws, police funding, and what happens with the property they own. These recommendations are for municipal staff, City Council and Halifax Regional Police*

- 7. Lived Experience informed decision-making on designated site selection**
- 8. Shelters, not tents**
- 9. Sustained and meaningful engagement with unhoused citizens**
- 10. Appropriate police responses, training, and protocols**

## **Provincial Government**

*The Provincial Government makes decisions about funding for non-profits and housing development, provides direct financial support to individuals, and regulates the rental market. These recommendations are for the Department of Community Services and Municipal Affairs.*

- 11. More investments in direct resources for people**
- 12. A standard and quantified definition of "affordability"**
- 13. Strengthening eviction prevention**

## **Collective Responsibility**

*Ultimately the only recommendation that people interviewed was for more housing. Collective responsibility is when we all acknowledge the role that we must play. The following recommendations are complex and require strategic, collective responses.*

- 14. Coordinate and collaborate**
- 15. Bring a variety of deeply affordable, social, and supportive housing units online**

# Introduction

In August 2022, the United Way of Greater Halifax commissioned a consultation with unhoused people sheltering in parks and encampments in Halifax and Dartmouth on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality. The consultation was carried out as an independent project of Eric Jonsson (Downtown Halifax Street Navigator Program) and Charlene Gagnon (YWCA Halifax).

The housing crisis in HRM has resulted in numerous homeless encampments and people sleeping outside in public spaces. The 2022 HRM Point in Time Count not only saw an increased number of unhoused people in the city overall, but also in the proportion of those sleeping outside, in vehicles, or structures unintended for human habitation compared to previous years – 18.5% of the whole homeless population compared to 8% in 2019.

This increased visibility of homelessness, plus an increased public concern for and interest in the impacts of homelessness, has resulted in a significant amount of pressure on governments to do something about it. The Municipal Government does not have a formal mandate to work on homelessness. Nor do they have the internal expertise, or dedicated budget lines to make a dent in the problem. However, they do have a mandate to hear, represent and make decisions on zoning, land-use, by-law enforcement, police funding etc. that affect unhoused citizens of HRM. This project is the first time the Municipal government has attempted to consult with people living outside in our community.

This consultation was designed to bring the lived experience perspective and community-based expertise to decision-makers, and inform planning, policies, and protocols around the city's responses to encampments and homelessness. It is not an "us" and "them" situation. The unhoused people in our community are also citizens who are guaranteed the same human right as those who are housed. This includes a democratic right to be heard and engage with political systems.

The authors of this report undertook the work with the understanding that it is the first step towards improving the lines of communication between lived experience and decision-makers. We are hopeful that this report is not going to be filed away as a box that has been checked. Engagement needs to be sustained, meaningful, and result in mutually agreed upon solutions and change.

Further, it is important to state that, ultimately, the only real solution here is more housing. Normalizing homeless encampments is a necessity that no one feels good about – it is putting a band-aid over a gaping wound. Most people working directly on this issue agree that it is the best form of harm-reduction we can implement for the current state and outlook of the problem.

**Halifax needs more social, supportive, and deeply affordable housing options across all points of the housing spectrum. This is the only practical solution for ending homelessness in our community.**

This report reflects the responses from 16 participants, and the collaborative analysis of findings from service providers working directly with the population, as well as staff from the Halifax Regional Municipality. While we value the insights and stories provided by participants, we recognize that this is only a fraction of the experiences, and we will be continuing to work at engaging more people in the months ahead.

## What Other Jurisdictions are Doing on Encampments

Approaches to encampments range across Canada, and while there are some human rights-based approaches, few models seem to include the provision of services such as electricity, running water, and food storage. However, there are some positive examples of jurisdictions that are changing the status quo, including: prioritizing outreach workers as the first point of contact with encampments; reducing forced evictions; and offering basic services such as food and water to residents.



## Winnipeg

Winnipeg, Manitoba takes a tacit acceptance approach to encampments. The city has a Non-Emergent Encampment Support Process in place that dispatches outreach workers to encampments instead of police. Residents are not asked to leave an encampment on public property/crown land or a transit shelter, unless there is an immediate life-safety risk.

Outreach workers provide residents with information about housing resources in the community, and if the resident chooses to stay where they are, there is no forced removal; the outreach workers will simply remain in contact with the encampment residents in an effort to find them more sustainable housing services. If there are complaints of safety risks, the City's Fire Prevention Branch will be dispatched to assess the situation. If, and only if there is a consistent pattern of behavior that causes risk to life, the Assistant Chief under the authority of the Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service Fire Paramedic Chief will issue an Order to Vacate. Before the ordered date for compliance, Main Street Project will liaise with the residents to ensure they understand the need to vacate and connect them to resources for support.

It is not clear how this works in practice, and whether every resident is provided with a housing option, but it appears that there is a conscious effort to find alternatives for the residents prior to enforcement of the order. This is all part of the Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, the development of which was facilitated by Winnipeg's entity for Reaching Home, End Homelessness Winnipeg.

## Toronto

The City of Toronto does not permit encampments or the erection of tents or other structures on City Property, including City parks. The City's Encampment Operations Group assesses risks at each recorded site to prioritize encampment responses. According to the City's Overall Encampment Strategy, Toronto only enforces the clearing of encampments after exhausting all tools and options available to help move people in encampments to safer, indoor spaces when there are serious health and safety risks that require immediate action. Although Toronto does not explicitly state that they will allow residents to remain on encampments that do not present safety concerns, it does have a robust Streets to Homes Street Outreach & Support Program that is designed to provide services to people who are sleeping outdoors. Services include but are not limited to: water and referrals to food programs; clothing and supplies; blankets and sleeping bags in the winter; and harm reduction supplies and services. As part of this program, Toronto funds several community organizations to extend these services to their neighborhoods, offering street outreach services directly to community.

## Oakland, California

Oakland, California has tried several ways to manage encampments in the city. In 2016, Oakland launched a pilot program called Compassionate Communities, which sanctioned an encampment to support unsheltered individuals. Oakland worked with local organizations and leaders in the encampment community to offer services to the encampment, including waste pick-up, portable toilets, sanitation stations, and mobile health clinics. The pilot led to the creation of the formal Community Cabins Program, which funds cabin sites that provide residents with temporary housing; sanitation infrastructure; and case managers who help residents obtain a California ID, find employment, and/or move to permanent housing. Although it has provided shelter to many, the program has been criticized for not including those with lived experience in program design.

Oakland released its Encampment Management Policy in 2020. The Policy designates encampments as either high-sensitivity areas or low-sensitivity areas. Encampments in high-sensitivity areas are subject to intervention on behalf of the city's Encampment Management Team (EMT). Intervention may represent a health and hygiene intervention, deep cleaning, partial closure, or full closure. If deep cleaning or closure is required, the city will give residents a 72-hour notice to vacate the

premises. They will be connected to an alternate housing option, or asked to relocate to a low-sensitivity area. Encampments in low-sensitivity areas are not subject to EMT intervention, unless they do not comply with the standards outlined in the Policy. The city will simply conduct outreach with the low-sensitivity encampments to help bridge residents into more permanent housing. Importantly, the Policy states that “an individual offered shelter and/or alternative housing who declines the offer may continue to camp without risk of being issued a citation or arrested for remaining encamped, unless the encampment must be partially or fully closed as described above for public health and/or public safety reasons.” However, scans of news articles about encampments in Oakland reveal that the Policy is not always followed, or at least, not always exercised peacefully.

## Methodology

Based on our knowledge of where people were sleeping and who was sleeping rough, we chose participants by trying to ensure a cross section of different ages, genders and sleeping situations. We decided to choose the participants rather than letting people self-select because of the possibility of people saying they were sleeping outside just to receive the \$75 honorarium. Clearly this presents a bias based on length of time homeless and willingness to engage with service providers. Participants are also skewed in terms of mental health and addiction status. We did not talk to folks who were extremely mentally unwell, or so intoxicated that they could not answer the questions, nor provided informed consent for the sharing of their stories. Mental health and addiction issues are a major factor in people’s experiences of homelessness, so this report does not claim to portray the experiences of all homeless people.

Also, as the social location of the interviewer is that of a white, cisgendered, heterosexual male, certain people may not have felt comfortable engaging, so this is not a holistic a cross section of the whole homeless population, rather a sample of individuals who met the above criteria.

After selecting the participants, we conducted interviews in convenient locations based on where the participant felt most comfortable. Some were conducted privately in a one-on-one format, while others were conducted in small groups. Most took place outside near where the participant was sleeping. Challenges arose when conducting interviews with people in busy encampment sites because other people around would chime in with their own opinions on the topics. Occasionally people would not feel comfortable sharing certain responses that could be overheard by others, so we tried to make the conversations as private as possible.

The questions we asked survey participants were created with input from the United Way, the Municipality, and the expertise from the contractors. We understood the goal of the questions to be to get an understanding of why people slept where they slept, and what services or supports they needed while living outside. We tried not ask too many questions because the people we spoke with spent most of their days hustling just trying to survive, and their interest waned after a certain amount of time. Most people found most of the questions easy to understand, however the last few questions we asked were almost universally met with confusion or lack of understanding. Question number 29, for instance, required further explanation every time we asked it, and most people just answered it the same way they answered the previous question.

The questions we asked, in order, were:

1. What gender do you identify as?
2. How old are you?
3. Is there anything you would like us to know about your race (or culture)?
4. When was the last time you were housed?
5. What happened that caused you to be homeless?
6. Where are you currently sleeping at night? (Type of arrangement and location/geography)

7. Why did you choose that location?
8. What do you like the most about it?
9. What do you like the least?
10. What is the most uncomfortable aspect of your current sleeping location?
11. How could it be more comfortable?
12. Where would you rather be sleeping tonight? (Type of housing/shelter and location/geography)
13. Aside from housing, what are your biggest needs right now, for services, supports, resources or amenities?
14. Who do you typically go to if you need services or support? (Person or agency)
15. Are there any areas in HRM which do not feel safe to you?
16. What makes them feel unsafe?
17. What is your biggest safety concern or risk?
18. How do you keep yourself safe?
19. If you are in crisis, who do you want to be assisting you?
20. Have you ever called the police for help or assistance?
21. Was it a positive or negative experience?
22. When was the last time you had an encounter with police in the community (where you didn't call them for help)?
23. What happened? Was it a positive or negative experience?
24. What is one thing you would like the police to know about how to improve their responses to the unhoused community?
25. If you could wave a magic wand right now to improve your situation, what would that look like for you?
26. Do you have any hopes, dreams, goals, or aspirations for the future?
27. Is there anything you would like HRM to know that we haven't asked about?
28. What would it mean to you if decision-makers would listen to and value your recommendations?
29. What would be an indicator to you that the government is listening to you and responding to homelessness in HRM?

Many safety considerations were taken in terms of how information was recorded and compiled for sharing. Informed consent was given by participants for interviews to record responses in the form of notes and direct quotes, and to share the information they provided in the form of reports to government and the public. Respondents were guaranteed anonymity and were only required to initial a receipt for the honoraria to be used for accounting purposes only. There were two people present for half of the interviews, which resulted in more capture of conversations the hour-long sessions. The quotes presented in this report have been written from the first-person perspective and edited for readability, they are not, however, transcribed direct quotes from audio recordings.

The sample included 16 people who were sleeping rough in Halifax (10) and Dartmouth (6). At the time people were interviewed, 14 were staying in an encampment area and 2 were camping in isolated wooded areas. Six were sleeping in a Tyvek (Mutual Aid Shelter) and 9 were sleeping in tents, and one was sleeping open air.

We talked to 11 men; 3 women; 2 transgender individuals ranging in age from 23-61. It is worth noting that all 3 women we talked to were coupled.

Due to a lack of representation in the encampments, no one who identified as African Nova Scotian was interviewed; 12 identified as white; 4 identified as indigenous

## Findings and Analysis

The stories and information collected were anonymized, presented to, and collaboratively analysed by service providers and municipal staff. A series of 5 analysis sessions were held with staff from HRM, the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, Welcome Housing, The Brunswick Street Mission, Adsum House, and Shelter NS.

In each of these sessions, participants read through responses on key questions related to location, comfort, needs, safety, crisis response, and policing, and were asked a series of questions around what stood out to them, the emergent themes, and suggested solutions or responses.

One key finding from this consultation is related to the diversity of people's backgrounds and experiences with being unhoused. And as noted above, this diversity was limited to the individuals we engaged with. In addition to differences related to demographic information (gender, age, race), for such a small sample there were many variations in people's lifetime experiences of homelessness and pathways to homelessness.

**Became homeless a week ago.** *"I didn't know anyone in Halifax, so I trusted the wrong person who turned out to be mentally unwell, and they kicked me out. So now I have nowhere to go."*

**Homeless for 6 months.** *"I couldn't keep up with the rent, so I saved my money and bought an RV. And then I moved into the RV when I got evicted. And then after a couple months of living in the RV, it got towed and I had to go find a tent to stay in. I can't afford to get my RV out of the impound lot."*

**Homeless since November 2021.** *"My lease ended, and I didn't have enough income for other housing."*

**Became homeless when Covid hit.** *"My landlord evicted me, and I didn't know about the eviction ban. I was a bit late on my rent and they said that was the reason for my eviction."*

**Homeless for 8 years.** *"My wife passed away and I lost my mind"*

Service providers are encountering more "unusual" clients, people whose only need is housing – they are not mental health consumers, they are not substance users, they are not victims or survivors of violence, they are not criminalized. The only common factor is that they are unhoused.

Contrary to narratives that this population prefers to be unhoused; almost all respondents in our sample desperately wanted their own housing. When we asked people where they would rather be staying tonight, they told us:

*"I want an apartment so badly."*

*"In a real bed in a house or apartment. I would live anywhere in the city."*

*"I'd be in my own apartment. They said it would be two or more years. I can't wait that long. I'll be in the ground by then."*

*"A warm house, not even a house, just four walls and a building that is not outside."*

*"In a shelter or somewhere inside at least."*

*"My own apartment or at least a hotel room."*

We talked to people who were employed, as well as unemployed; who were using substances, as well as sober; who had many experiences of homeless in their lifetime, as well as being homeless for the first time in their lives. This diversity highlights the need for a multiplicity of solutions and individualized approaches to sheltering and supporting people.

Approximately one quarter of respondents indicated that they had issues with the shelter environment. Their reasons for not wanting to access shelters were like findings from the 2022 HRM PiT Count: they did not want to stay anywhere that had “rules”; they were partnered; they felt that many shelters, and the modulars, were “unsafe” environments.

When respondents were asked about the systemic responses to homelessness being implemented, most disagreed with current approaches.

*“The tent cities they are placing for people to go to are horrible. It is like they are trying to break the homeless with providing only options that are horrible. I was disgusted when I saw it. They said, [REDACTED] them, out of sight, out of mind. All it is going to do is make things much worse. They are torturing us and putting us in the worst spots.”*

*“They need to know this is a crisis. Income and money are what people need. How can they allow this to happen? No more band-aid solutions! Non-profits are lining their pockets and exploiting people. Why are you spending all that money and there is still no housing? People just need money, and they can figure it out for themselves.”*

Although there has been much financial and intellectual investment in this harm-reduction approach, and although it is accepted as what is needed to happen, service providers who participated in the collaborative analysis believed that these are investments in band-aids – towards the goal of keeping people as safe and dignified as possible. These investments are not treating the gaping wound – addressing the goal of what is really needed, which is deeply affordable housing. There is a sense of impossibility and hopelessness towards that goal, which is contributing to sector burnout and the increasing number of people in need of government support and resources to just survive.

## Location - Pros

When asked about why people selected the locations they did, and why they liked them, the dominant themes that emerged were related to convenience, community, and safety.

People selected locations because it was “close to” something – what that “something” was depended on the individual needs and circumstances of people. Being close to where they worked, washrooms, places to eat, payphones, bus stops, and service providers were all mentioned as contributing factors to location selection. Also, familiarity of locations where people used to live, or grew up.

*“It’s my stomping ground.”*

The people we talked to who were in the Tyvek shelters described how the structures were passed onto to them from the former residents, indicating a certain level of self-organization. There are no formal processes in place to prioritize or select who has access to the Tyvek shelters, this is happening organically.

The importance of payphones for some highlights the privileges of cell phone ownership – most of us would have no idea where to find a payphone. It was noted by one service provider that one of their clients said they knew the location of all nine payphones on the peninsula – this is something that is worth mapping and considering in location selection.

This theme of convenience also highlighted the need for locations to have high walkability scores in relation to food, the libraries, and services or resources.

For those who were staying in encampments, the words “peaceful” “chill” and “relaxing” came up multiple times. People mentioned valuing the green spaces and nature as contributing to that calm. This sense of peace also came from the sense of community they felt in their various locations – both the internal community with other people staying at the various locations, and the sense of community felt through generous and kind community volunteers.

*“All my friends are on the streets around here and it’s close to them. The park itself is peaceful. Life on the streets is very stressful, people are nasty to you, they are mean to you, so the park is calm and chill. It’s safe. There is a water fountain here that kind of sounds like a waterfall and it makes you relax.”*

*“People often drop off food and other donations. There used to be more stuff dropped off, but now we aren’t getting as much. There are good people here, and good volunteers and outreach staff.”*

Service providers noted that in some locations, the over-generosity of some community members and volunteers was creating new problems – with excessive perishable food donations that could not be consumed and contributing to rat and pest infestations. Ideas around better systems of food distribution included engaging Feed Nova Scotia to include food delivery to the various designated locations, or the suggestion of distributing pre-packaged meals that would not result in an excess of food laying around the location to attract rodents and other pests.

Discussions of location safety were predominantly related to safety from police harassment, particularly for those staying in sanctioned sites. This was also mentioned by people staying out of sight in isolated wooded areas.

*“Because I leave no trace, people do not rat on me for staying there if they do see me sleeping... great to not have to fear the police telling me I need to move along and go.”*

*“(Cogswell Park) It’s one of the only places where cops don’t bother us.”*

For those who were staying in isolated wooded areas, safety meant being away from other people, and keeping to themselves.

*“Total solitude and it is complete darkness in the park (no lights). I know that no one will see me and come up on me in the middle of the night. If they do, I can hear them in the branches and trees.”*

*“I feel safe there and no one knows where I am at. I like to be by myself”*

People are staying in a mix of areas with a lot of coverage and privacy, and areas with open green space. Some of the designated sites have both elements in the same location. In collaborative analysis sessions there was some discussion about the location safety from a CPTED perspective, where covered and hidden areas would pose risk – however, as we have heard, for some, this conventional wisdom does not necessarily apply.

## Location – Cons

*“I’m homeless. There is not a way to make it more comfortable.”*

When asked about what they did not like about the locations they had chosen, and what made it uncomfortable, the dominant themes were related to protection (from people and the weather), the lack of basic amenities such as running water, electricity, and a place to store and prepare food, and physical discomfort.

When people live in public spaces their whole lives are on display, and there is very little privacy or protection from public scrutiny. Respondents often complained about invasions of privacy.

*“A lot of people go through here during the nighttime, and I can hear them outside. Sometimes they will knock and bang at my shed and it’ll wake me up.”*

*“There’s lots of traffic driving by and people often are looking at us... Some privacy would be nice”*

There is also little protection from the elements, particularly for those sleeping in tents. However, even the people staying in the Tyveks were not immune to the forces of nature. Whether it was leaking roofs in the rain, or unbearable heat in the summer, most respondents indicated that they did not feel protected from the elements. Notably, these interviews took place in the height of summer, but a few respondents were already looking ahead to the cold of the winter months.

*“If I am still here in the winter, I am getting a generator so I can heat myself, make coffee and charge my phone.”*

Access to electricity was repeatedly mentioned as a need and viewed as something that could make things more comfortable within the Tyveks particularly. The rats were also repeatedly mentioned as a source of discomfort, with the presence of rodents being tied to a lack of running water for cleaning, and inadequate places to store and prepare food. And while people prioritized proximity to a washroom, it was noted that the installation of porta-potties at designated locations created new challenges and safety concerns at one location.

*“The porta potty is [REDACTED] it’s not fit for anyone to use.”*

*“Sometimes random people use drugs in the porta potties, and we find them asleep when we go to the bathroom in the morning.”*

Unsurprisingly, respondents talked about the physical discomfort associated with not having a proper bed and mattress to sleep on. They also talked about how homelessness is fundamentally an uncomfortable state to be in, as many of these issues intersected and were related to one another.

*“There are no showers. Sometimes I can go to Birch Cove Park for a cold shower, but that is only open in the summer. I can’t cook or make coffee because there isn’t any electricity. Also, there is no fan or air conditioning, so the heat is uncomfortable. I am not sleeping well because of that.”*

*“The bed in the Tyvek isn’t very comfortable. We don’t have power and the window doesn’t work so there is no air flow. Sometimes random people knock on the door at 3 am. Lately it hasn’t happened as much, but it used to be 3-4 times a week.”*

Among service providers, it was noted that while there is a priority for distribution of tents, there is little to no resources available to enhance the comforts of tents, such as air mattresses, yoga mats, palettes to lift the tents off the ground, and

hanging tents. It was also noted that tents are having to be replaced frequently, along with sleeping bags and bedding that becomes wet from the rain with no means of drying them out, so they just get trashed. Suggestions of bigger tents to be able to accommodate a cot were also discussed, as well as the need for winterized camping gear and insulated tarps for the upcoming winter.

## Needs and Support

We asked respondents to talk about what their greatest needs were, and which (if any) agencies or individuals were assisting them in getting those needs filled. Four of the 16 respondents indicated that they were “self-sufficient” and did not need assistance or support for anything. In some cases, this turning away from “help” was related to prior experiences of what could be described as “systemic trauma” – a feeling of betrayal or shunning when they were using services or trying to access assistance from services in the past. The only programming or support they accessed was related to food – from the drop-in meal and food programs and from the street navigators.

When talking to service providers, it was anecdotally noted that approximately 10% of the people that they see when they are doing street outreach are not interested in engaging with service providers or accessing any services at all.

For the remaining 12 respondents who were connected to at least one service provider or system (such as the healthcare system), answers about needs were very much related to the themes in the previous section regarding what was uncomfortable about their current situation. In a state of homelessness, the only needs fulfillment that people are engaging in are the most basic ones – access to food, water, protection from the elements, a place to use the washroom, and a safe place to sleep.

Food programs such as Margaret’s House, Soul’s Harbour Sunday Supper, and the Brunswick Street Mission Breakfast Program, were the most accessed services noted by respondents. The Street Navigators and Outreach Workers, as well as health care providers, were also highly regarded by respondents as professionals who were trusted and easily accessed – this included people’s family doctors, the MOSH team, and doctors and nurses at the Emergency Room.

Notably, it was found that it is people’s individual, one-to-one relationships which were important – and it was the same service providers identified and named by respondents as people of trust who they thought could help.

It bears repeating that ultimately the greatest need is for housing.

## Safety

Respondents were asked several questions related to where and why they felt unsafe, and the strategies they implemented to enhance their own sense of safety. The dominant themes that emerged from the responses of safety were related to fear (specifically of being stabbed or robbed), the mental health of “other” homeless people, and the overall lateral violence that is being reported from the street. Two of the 16 respondents indicated that they did not have any real safety concerns, one noting that his only safety concern was related to his health.

Where people felt unsafe was often referential to the current community they were in: people in Dartmouth feared people in Halifax, people in Halifax would never go to Dartmouth, people who disliked shelters felt that the areas around them were unsafe, the people who were solo camping felt that the encampments were unsafe. The only exception to this was in relation to “Downtown” – most people expressed a fear related to Downtown Halifax – and this was driven by numerous accounts of stabbings, and gossip among the population about things happening in different locations.

*“Downtown Halifax is getting bad, I’ve heard. There is a lot more people with knives on them”*



*“I feel unsafe wherever those stabbings were – Downtown or the South End of Halifax and Dartmouth. I don’t want to get stabbed. I’m worried about getting jumped.”*

Security of possessions and a fear of being robbed was also a common element of this theme. While unhoused people have a minimal level of possessions, what they do have is very important to them. Fear of theft and robbery consistently came up in relation to the shelters, and the insecurity of tents.

*“People in shelters will kill you to take your money. People could rob me in my tent. There is no lock or nothing, my tent isn’t safe.”*

The mental health of “others” was also a dominant theme related to safety, and this was often paired with substance use and the “unpredictability” of people.

*“I always need to be aware of my surroundings. I don’t go to Spring Garden Road due to other individuals who are struggling with their mental health who frequent the area and are unpredictable.”*

*“People think they can do what they want to us. Other homeless people can start stuff. We don’t want too many people knowing where we live.”*

There is a balance to be struck between those who are active substances users, those who are trying to maintain sobriety under impossible conditions, and those who fall in between. Many people expressed their discomfort being around people who were using substances in relation to their own safety, however others expressed appreciation for their freedom to use substances at certain locations. One respondent who was a long-term Tyvek resident at a designated site stated “we police our own” in relation to substance use at the site – drinking and marijuana use was ok, but opioid use was not.

This led to conversations among service providers about whether at least one of the designated areas could be a designated sober site, however questions of how policies like this could be enforced at the designated sites remained unanswered.

Even though there were safety concerns about the mental health and unpredictability of others, some respondents also vocalized a level of empathy and compassion for what others are going through. Derogatory and stigmatizing words like “deranged,” “crazy,” or “junkie” were notably absent in most of the interviews.

*“They can’t help themselves.”*

Lateral violence is said to occur within the context of oppressed communities and environments. It happens when people in powerless positions or situations, use bullying and violence with their peers to gain power themselves. To address the root causes of the violence being reported among the community, we must understand and analyse it as a systemic problem, rather than as an interpersonal one.

Another key finding of the responses related to safety, was the absence of direct discussion about sexual assault that is known by service providers to be occurring in the context of the encampments. One participant did discuss hearing that young girls were “being pimped out” and another talked hypothetically about the risk of women being raped; however, no respondent expressed explicit fears about this happening to them. This is almost certainly due to a sampling error – as all the female-identified people we talked to were coupled, and their partners were seen to reduce their vulnerability and risk of imminent sexualized violence.

Strategies that people implemented to keep themselves safe mostly consisted of “keeping to themselves” and staying away from areas that they had previous bad experiences with. Of note, and as a counter-point to people’s fear of being stabbed – some respondents indicated that they, themselves, carried knives, or had other things that could serve as weapons, such as big sticks and crowbars, to protect themselves if they were attacked.

There was a considerable amount of discussion in the collaborative analysis sessions on how to support leadership within the encampments as a strategy to enhance safety at the encampments. While everyone acknowledged that supporting self-governance, defined as a person being empowered to make their own decisions about how they live their lives and households, was important; there were concerns raised about attempting to formalize the organic self-organization and policing that is already occurring and how it could potentially foster an increase in lateral violence at the sites. The question of whether it is a good idea to impose systems of power in an environment of oppressed and marginalized individuals remains unanswered, but something that is worthy of further inquiry.

While there is much literature on the benefits of introducing democratizing principles of self-organization within encampments, there are very few examples of this happening where that is being guided by organizations or external agencies.

In Halifax, the engagement between people sleeping at the encampments, service providers is disconnected, individualized, and predominantly survival based. Unless a coordinated approach can be developed to address people’s basic needs, it will be difficult, perhaps even unethical, to ask people to engage in community development committees and processes when they are unsheltered, hungry, and in a state of constant fear for their safety.

## Policing

People were asked about encounters with police, and what they thought about the role of police in relation to crisis intervention and the encampments. They were also asked about what advice they would give to police about dealing with homeless people. This was the only area of inquiry where responses did not have clear and identifiable themes – respondents’ experiences with and orientation towards police were very diverse, as were the interpretations of policing through the collaborative analysis.

Whether or not people called police themselves, or they had police called on them, encounters with police were reported as being positive, negative, and neutral. The qualities that made encounters positive were related to the individual officers involved being “helpful”, “compassionate”, and “kind.” The qualities that made encounters negative were related to “making assumptions”, “being disrespectful”, and not being taken seriously. More than one person told stories of times they called police, but police did not show up.

Approximately half of the respondents indicated that if they were in a crisis, they would call police as a last resort for assistance. However, those same respondents also brought up the street stigma of snitching or “being a rat” associated with calling police.

*“I would call police if there was a crisis. I know I am not supposed to say that. But I have no friends on the street. I can’t trust no one, and no one has my back. So, if I need help from police, I will call them however, if I do call them, I am a rat. I then become labelled and even more unsafe.”*

The other half of respondents indicated they had other people they would turn to if they were in crisis, which included the street navigators and outreach workers, and healthcare professionals at MOSH and the ER. The only time the Mobile Mental Health Crisis team was mentioned was as an agency which would be explicitly not called.

One thing that was consistent with relation to the police was the sense that they “harassed” homeless people, and the people staying in the encampments.

*“The police are getting worse, and there is a lot of profiling that happens against homeless people.”*

*“The cops told me, they are not here to arrest us, they just want to talk. Why are they looking for people here?”*

*“They will sometimes drive by, and if they come into the park, it is because they are often looking for someone, and asking us if we know where they are.”*

*“They always ask questions in a way that makes me feel like they are accusing me. It’s really rude and it doesn’t have to be like that.”*

When we asked people if they had any advice for police on their interactions with homeless people, most indicated that all they were looking for was respect and compassion. There was a sense that the police were incapable of making the changes necessary to bring about more compassionate policing practices.

*“They can’t and they won’t (take advice). No one wants to call them for help because they don’t help. Plus, not everyone has a phone to call police... the gun on the waist and badge; it changes people.”*

In the collaborative analysis sessions, there were very divided opinions on what the role of police should be in relation to the encampments. Ultimately everyone agreed that all individuals, whether they are unhoused or housed, have the autonomy and judgement to call the police themselves, if they feel like they need police assistance. However, there is a larger question surrounding whether police should or should not have a consistent and sanctioned role within the context of the encampments. One service provider highlighted that systemically, policing practices focus on “containment” rather than “de-escalation” and that this makes it very challenging to implement any types of policies and protocols that could be considered trauma informed.

Some service providers believed there was a role for community-based policing practices that are built on relationships of trust and involving individual officers that have good reputations among the encampments and shelter users. Others believed that there is no way to get to a model of ethical, compassionate, or trauma-informed policing under the current funding and power structures within policing systems.

Ultimately, police need to lean into developing relationships of trust, not only with people experiencing homelessness, but also with the service providers working with the population. Partnerships with service providers to assist with de-escalation of situations should be prioritized and implemented on the systemic level, rather than on the individual level.

### Being Heard

People were asked to reflect on the personal impacts of meaningful engagement with the government and police. Although everyone welcomed the theory of it, many remained skeptical that it was even possible. It is worth noting that for

respondents, meaningful engagement did not mean consultations, such as the current one being done, or participation on advisories or committees. Instead, it meant one-to-one conversations with elected officials, the people who they viewed as the decision makers and people with power to bring about change.

*“They will just file this information away, and nothing will come out of it. They don’t care. It would mean everything (to be heard). But they won’t even come to talk to us. Look they sent you guys to do it. You are the focal point for our voice. I hope they listen to you because they won’t listen to us.”*

*“No city council people ever come by here to talk to us. No one. It is not like we are unapproachable. It would make me feel like I am part of the community (to be heard) because I don’t feel like it currently. I would feel seen for being me, and not like I’m being judged when they don’t even know or try to get to know who I am. Their current approach is out of sight, out of mind and shoving us to the back of the bush where we can be unseen and forgotten. Sit down and talk to us instead of assuming all homeless people are horrible.”*

## Recommendations

While the purpose of this report was to develop recommendations for encampment responses and protocols, the only practical solution here is more deeply housing.

**People need access to deeply affordable and social housing that currently does not exist in the market.**

While there are new non-profit housing units coming online because of federal, provincial, and municipal funding investments, these units are a drop in the bucket compared to what is needed. The community needs 1000’s of deeply affordable and social housing units to come online immediately. This will require deep collaboration and partnership given the complexity and scale of the current problem. Since we all have a role to play in the solution to these problems, these recommendations must go beyond what the city is exclusively responsible for.

These recommendations were developed through a collaborative analysis process with a series of 5 sessions with non-profit staff providing direct services to the population and HRM staff. They also reflect existing work being done through the recently struck Inter-Agency Task Force with representatives from grassroots collectives, non-profit (executive and direct service providers), HRM and The Nova Scotia Department of Community Service.

### Community at Large

*Homelessness is a community issue that directly affects everyone. The community at-large includes neighbors of the encampments, schools, volunteers, and the public.*

#### **1. Awareness about the impacts of stigma**

Stigma is when someone is treated like a stereotype, and not like a human being on equal footing as everyone else. It can have great impact a person’s mental health and vulnerability.

**ACTION: Be mindful of the language used to describe people’s experiences of homelessness, substance use, and mental health.**

## 2. Empathy for people's situation and struggle

Homelessness is a systemic failure, and not the result of any personal "failings" of an individual. Empathy allows us to build social connections which can result in safer communities and neighbourhoods.

**ACTION: Treat unhoused people the way you would like to be treated.**

## 3. Respect for people's privacy and belongings

Unhoused people live in public spaces and do not have the privilege of privacy, or a place to store food and their belongings.

**ACTION: Do not approach people unless invited or offer unsolicited help; do check with service providers if you wish to volunteer or donate**

**ACTION: Do not disturb or discard people's belonging**

**ACTION: Do not call police on unhoused people simply for being unhoused and accessing public spaces**

## Non-Profits

*Non-profits are the flow through of funding for social services from the government to the community. These recommendations are for non-profit organizations that receive funding to support and provide services to the homeless population.*

## 4. Prioritization of culturally specific supports

While many mainstream non-profits are already working to improve the services delivered to African Nova Scotian, Indigenous and Gender Diverse individuals, there are still many gaps, and over-representation of these communities in the homeless population

**ACTION: Representation of African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, Youth and 2SLGBTQ+ in staff, leadership, and programming**

**ACTION: Supportive partnership with African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, Youth and 2SLGBTQ+ led organizations delivering culturally specific housing, programs, and resources.**

## 5. Expertise-sharing with government, police, and private sector landlords

Non-profits are fierce advocates for the people they serve. This often puts them in adversarial positions with government and the private sector, which erodes trust, amplifies frustrations, and impacts opportunity to make change.

**ACTION: Active participation in inter-agency collaborations and partnerships which are solution based and action oriented.**

**ACTION: Educate those who directly engage with the homeless population such as police, municipal workers, and potential landlords about the benefits of trauma-informed practice**

## 6. Ongoing evaluation of programs and services

We heard from several people who had bad experiences with service providers, which resulted in them turning away from services and supports. Providing opportunity for feedback is one of the tenants of trauma-informed practice. Program and service evaluation is an opportunity for consultation with service users, which can address problems and reduce barriers to service access.

**ACTION: Create internal and external mechanisms for people to provide feedback on their experiences accessing services and supports**

## Municipal Government

*The Municipal Government makes decisions on land-use, by-laws, police funding, and what happens with the property they own. These recommendations are for municipal staff, City Council and Halifax Regional Police*

### **7. Lived Experience informed decision-making on designated site infrastructure and location selection**

People told us that at the bare minimum they need access to running water, washrooms, and a place to store and cook food at the designated sites. Where there were porta-potties at locations, people in some sites reported them as unusable due to it being the place where substance users would seek privacy to use. Location selection was based on many individualized factors, which included proximity to needs and other people that they did not want to engage with.

**ACTION: The current designated sites be equipped with a consistent and reliable water source and food storage and preparation areas.**

**ACTION: Work with Mainline and other harm-reduction agencies to develop a safer use strategy at the encampment locations which could create an alternative for use of the bathrooms and explore the feasibility of designated sober locations.**

**ACTION: Addition of multiple small and scattered designated sites across the HRM with consideration of proximity to food, payphones, public washrooms, and community resources, such as libraries and community resources.**

**ACTION:**

### **8. Shelters, not tents**

The “Tyvek” or emergency crisis shelters built by volunteers at HMA have been organically operating within the community for 2 years now. Although they are in disrepair, and have fundamental design and safety flaws, they are deeply appreciated and valued by the people who are sheltering in them. The outcomes of the people who have accessed these shelters are unknown, however it would be a worthy evaluation to carry out. As there is now 2 years worth of experiences from people, there would be enough information to analyse the short and long term benefits of having these emergency crisis structures in the housing mix in HRM. Based on the small sample we talked to, the Tyveks are far better than tents as a response to the crisis. Shelters or tiny homes are a better band-aid.

**ACTION: Investment in and installation of secure, weather-proofed crisis shelters with a small power supply (such as the WELL Engineered ones) to replace all of the existing Tyveks and new ones at all of the existing designated locations.**

**ACTION: Decriminalization of grassroots, volunteer efforts to build and install temporary crisis shelters.**

### **9. Sustained and meaningful engagement with unhoused citizens**

It is challenging to engage people who are living in survival mode with higher orders of privilege such as community advisories, consultations, or research projects. Especially if they do not see the result of their engagement as having a direct benefit on their specific situation. There are many ways to engage with marginalized people in ways that are sustainable and meaningful, however these must be guided through existing systems of support and well-being. In many cases, meaningful engagement simply meant that their elected representative would come talk to them and see them as human.

**ACTION: Partnering with an organization that has existing mechanisms of advisories and consulting with lived experience such as North End Community Health Clinic's Overlook First Voice Advisory**

**ACTION: Elected officials directly engage with and represent the interests of unhoused citizens in decision-making**

**ACTION: The re-introduction of the Halifax Report Card on Homelessness to set benchmarks for and evaluate success of ongoing efforts on an annual basis**

## **10. Appropriate police responses, training, and protocols**

The only thing that was clear in the responses around police was that the community is very divided. Noting that we did not talk to any African Nova Scotian respondents, which was a sampling error that leaves a void in the completeness of the information, it was still surprising to all people involved in the collaborative analysis that around half of the people reported positive or neutral interactions with police. The biggest complaint about the police was their bedside manner, so to speak.

**ACTION: Halifax Regional Police prioritizing relationship building with service providers**

**ACTION: Halifax Regional Police participation in inter-agency committees and partnerships**

**ACTION: Collaborative development of appropriate and trauma-informed protocols for responding to calls related to people living in public spaces and sheltering at the encampment locations**

## Provincial Government

*The Provincial Government makes decisions about funding for non-profits and housing development, provides direct financial support to individuals, and regulates the rental market. These recommendations are for the Department of Community Services and Municipal Affairs and address some of the root causes identified through the collaborative analysis sessions.*

## **11. More investments in direct resources for people**

The number of people in need of direct financial and material support is substantially growing. This means an increase to the number of people accessing services and the existing non-profit housing stock in the city. In some cases, all people need is a place to live, which really means, all they need is more money to pay the rent. As one service provider noted, "We don't need more Housing Support Workers, because there is no housing to place people."

**ACTION: Increase level and amount of unrestricted funding that non-profits can use responsively based on the growing number and diverse needs of unsheltered people.**

**ACTION: Creation of emergency housing grant, which is a direct to government application, and direct to recipient distribution.**

## **12. A standard and quantified definition of "affordability"**

The current definition of "affordability" exists in relation to private sector development and current market pricing and does not match the reality of people's incomes and cost of living. Since the private sector uses this definition to access grants, bonuses and tax shelters, this number should be calculated such as the LICO, or any number of governments implemented income-testing formulas for service users.

**ACTION: The calculation of urban and rural income thresholds for "affordable housing" developments based on income assistance rates and the best available data of cost of living in various communities.**

## **13. Strengthening eviction prevention**

Once people lose their housing, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to find a new place to live at the same rental levels of just 2 years ago. In addition to the reports of potentially illegal evictions shared in this report, there have been numerous media reports of bad actor landlords who have exploited loopholes in the Residential Tenancies Act to evict long-term and/or stable tenants. Service providers are reporting an increased number of people who have been stably housed for their whole lives, now facing, and experiencing homelessness for the first time in their lives. Eviction prevention is one avenue of homelessness prevention that can be implemented through greater government oversight and regulation of the rental housing market.

**ACTION: Legislation, enforcement; and stronger penalties for illegal evictions**

**ACTION: Stronger protections for tenants with more accountability and higher financial penalties for unscrupulous landlords.**

## Collective Responsibility

*Collective responsibility is when we all acknowledge the role that we must play. The following recommendations are complex and require strategic, collective responses.*

### 14. Coordinate and collaborate

Although there are a variety of services and supports being offered to people sleeping at the encampments and other locations outside, these services are largely disconnected and uncoordinated. Coordination and integration of services can increase people's access to their basic needs and resources, and depending on their composition, can also serve as effective intervention teams, as alternatives to police.

**ACTION: The Municipality and the Province co-fund an encampment coordinator position that is housed with HRM and works in collaboration with an intervention team comprised of service providers and first responders to ensure basic needs and safety at all encampment locations. This would include things like food and supply distribution, property management, and addressing direct safety concerns.**

**ACTION: Non-profit agencies delivering direct support and outreach to the encampments support the participation of their outreach and navigator staff in the intervention team**

### 15. Bring a variety of deeply affordable, social, and supportive housing units online

**The only direct and specific recommendation that people interviewed had was for more housing. The actions needed to make this recommendation happen are beyond the scope of this report, and it will never happen without collaboration and collective responsibility from all individuals, agencies and systems getting paid to deal with it.**