

Ending Homelessness for People Living in Encampments in Canada

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

December 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

NOTE TO READER..... 3

1. INTRODUCTION 4

2. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF “ENCAMPMENT” 4

3. THE RIGHT TO HOUSING, CHARTER CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPECTING EXISTING LAWS..... 5

4. GETTING MORE SOLUTIONS AND INTERIM MEASURES ON BOARD 5

5. PEOPLE CANNOT BE FORCED TO ACCEPT ANY SERVICE OFFER..... 8

6. SUPPORTING IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN ENCAMPMENTS 8

7. EXAMINE THE EXISTING HOMELESSNESS AND RE-HOUSING SYSTEM OF CARE 8

8. LEADERSHIP 11

9. SUSTAINED RESPONSE 12

10. CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EVENT OF CLOSURE 14

11. CONCLUSION..... 17

1. APPENDIX A – ENCAMPMENT PREPARATION AND RESPONSE CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS 18

2. APPENDIX B – ENTITIES PROVIDING INPUT AND GUIDANCE 20

3. APPENDIX C – ENCAMPMENT ASSESSMENT 24

4. APPENDIX D – RESPONDING TO LARGER ENCAMPMENTS IN SMALLER SECTIONS 26

5. APPENDIX E – ENCAMPMENT DATA DASHBOARDS 27

Note to Reader

This report – a DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION - was commissioned by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness to stimulate a national discussion about ending homelessness for people living in encampments through local, housing-focused responses that respect the rights of people living in encampments. OrgCode Consulting, Inc. was retained to prepare the report given the firm’s experience assisting communities with encampments.

Drafts of the report have been reviewed by people with lived experience, front line organizations, community-based organizations, service managers, and housing rights experts, and reflects their input to date. The report should be read as a DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION. The process for engagement to further refine the report continues. People are invited to send written feedback to info@caeh.ca by February 26, 2021. Also, CAEH and OrgCode will host roundtables with experts, report users and people with lived experience in the first quarter of 2021. The final version of the report will be published in March 2021.

The report should not be understood or interpreted as legal advice.

1. Introduction

Inadequate housing and structural inequities continue across the country. Homelessness is one indicator of these inadequacies and inequities. Beyond experiences of hidden and sheltered homelessness, living in an encampment is a reality for too many Canadians.

Encampments are another indicator of the failure to prioritize affordable and supportive housing development across the country. Indigenous People continue to be adversely impacted by the colonial system and injustices, resulting in being disproportionately homeless on their traditional and ancestral land. Unsheltered homelessness should never be the only option available for individuals, couples, and families that experience homelessness.

With the [National Housing Strategy Act](#) (June 2019) and [A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada](#) (April 2020), many homelessness response system leaders and municipal leaders across Canada have been grappling with effective approaches to provide support to people living within encampments, while providing guidance to municipal departments that have existing by-laws that seem to allow for an enforcement approach to encampments. An historic preference for enforcement-based responses are rarely housing-focused, culturally appropriate, or trauma-informed.

This may be a defining moment for the homelessness response system and its leaders – system managers, community-based organizations, service providers, advocates, those in the public service, elected officials, volunteers, faith leaders, funders, people with lived experience – to forge a collective vision and action plan to collaboratively resolve homelessness through robust services and housing solutions to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, while advocating for and promoting a rights based response to encampments. The fault lines within the current inequitable systems have been amplified with people residing outside in communities throughout the country that never faced this previously, and those communities that have a history of encampments are seeing more and larger encampments.

This document outlines considerations to respond in a manner consistent with the right to housing and United Nations [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#), respects the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), acknowledges political and public pressures, and never loses sight that housing, with person-centred supports for many, will be the solution to homelessness for people living in encampments.

2. Towards A Definition of “Encampment”

An agreed upon national definition of an encampment would be ideal. In the absence of that, definitions may need to be developed at the local level. To be considered in the definition is how many consecutive nights location needs to be occupied to be considered an encampment, and whether or not the definition includes tents, vehicles or any other structures not designed for permanent human habitation. Additional considerations may be necessary for appropriateness of a definition for specific populations (e.g., Indigenous people, youth, etc.) Furthermore, the definition may need to consider whether or not the encampment is happening on public land or private property.

3. The Right to Housing, Charter Considerations and Respecting Existing Laws

Efforts to work with people in encampments should embrace a human rights-based approach that reflects the legal obligations of all governments to uphold the *National Housing Strategy Act* as well as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Those experiencing homelessness, including those in encampments are people with rights and they do not surrender their rights by living in an encampment. They are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In fact, case law in British Columbia (e.g. *Victoria v. Adams* 2008/2009, *Abbotsford v. Shantz* 2015, *BC v. Adamson* 2016) has demonstrated that local anti-camping bylaws may violate the rights to life, liberty, and security of the person as secured in s. 7 of the *Charter*. Additional sections of the *Charter* may be engaged for protection of unsheltered persons in encampments, in particular s. 15 equality rights and s. 2 (b) freedom of expression.

The *National Protocol* provides 8 principles for any community's response to homeless encampments. For homelessness response systems that are wondering how to position this ideal within their currently imperfect reality, perhaps the following summary of five key elements of the *right to housing* provide a starting point for immediate efforts to enhance local responses to encampments:

1. To ensure that people's right to housing is strengthened, responses to encampments must maintain safe, appropriate housing as the solution to homelessness;
2. Homelessness response systems continue to ensure that people in encampments have access to housing, as well as interim measures like safe and appropriate shelter if it is desired;
3. Engagement with persons in encampments be grounded in a commitment to deconstruct ineffective and inequitable colonial-based approaches, and to acknowledge the distinct experiences of Indigenous People;
4. The human rights of people in encampments are not violated;
5. People living in the encampment are provided opportunities for meaningful participation in matters that pertain to them.

4. Getting More Solutions and Interim Measures on Board

To respond to encampments consistent with the *right to housing*, appropriate and adequate housing must be the first consideration, and efforts to add more housing options within existing housing stock through various means will be necessary. However, overcoming decades of woefully inappropriate housing policy and investments will not happen overnight. Expanding these housing options will require ongoing political and financial commitment, and also require innovation and urgency. Communities will likely need to examine interim measures that provide safe, solution-focused alternatives to outdoor homelessness. More people will likely die without a response to unsheltered homelessness that focuses on maximizing all housing opportunities that exist presently.

As an interim measure, communities may explore additional shelter options to provide a suitable, temporary place to stay. But if shelter is the only focus – and communities put all of their investment into shelter options – there will remain people living outdoors. Expanding capacity of both housing and

shelter options is often necessary in communities in order to better respond to homelessness generally, and encampments specifically.

To increase housing stock in a manner that can be faster than traditionally built structures, consider the following solutions to expand housing solutions:

- **Local, portable rent supplements:** examine local government investment in additional rent supplements that are attached to the individual, couple or family - not a unit - to allow more access to private market housing where affordability is the barrier.
- **Crowdfunder funding:** consolidate one place for all people in the public that are concerned about the encampment(s) and want to assist to provide funding that can be used to help people access housing through the likes of first and last month's rent, security deposits, utilities, basic supplies, and/or, ongoing rental assistance.
- **Motel acquisition and conversion:** purchase and convert motels into housing as has been done in several Canadian communities to increase overall housing options, especially supportive housing options.
- **Modular construction:** because it can often be completed quicker than site-built traditional construction, it is possible to more rapidly add housing stock to vacant lots and/or increase infill development options in the community.
- **Acquisition of existing multi-unit residential buildings:** so long as existing low-income tenants are not displaced, acquisition of multi-unit residential buildings can increase the availability of housing stock over time.
- **Single family home acquisition and conversion to legal rooming houses:** many communities, as part of their history, have had dwellings that were single family homes modified to function as rooming houses. The dwindling rooming house stock throughout the country needs to be replaced as another lower cost housing option.
- **Master lease for rental acquisition:** especially in markets with lower vacancy rates and issues of affordability, the community may consider master leasing units in the private market, and then subletting those same units to people experiencing homelessness at a more affordable rate.
- **Legalizing, supporting and/or promoting secondary suites:** with appropriate zoning and safety measures in place, communities may consider (further) legalizing, supporting and promoting secondary suites as an affordable housing option.

- **Convert transitional housing into permanent housing:** using an existing multi-unit residential asset in a different manner (permanent housing rather than transitional housing) can increase permanent housing stock.

In the event the existing shelter system is full in the community, and people experiencing homelessness have no other viable options, consider the following interim measures to expand capacity:

- **Amend existing shelter operations:** (re)examine prioritization for shelter, diversion practices, access to shelter, and flow-through within the shelter system, as well as ensuring all usable shelter spaces are operational subject to COVID-related safety measures.
- **Optimize diversion efforts for safe family/friend reunification options:** if people in encampments have safe and appropriate options to live with friends/family such that it does not compromise the housing stability of the family/friend and they have confirmed they can support and provide accommodation, whether that friend/family member is local or elsewhere, it should be supported.
- **Motel rental/acquisition as shelter:** add/expand contracts with motel operators to access more space within existing unused motel accommodation, or acquire motels and convert them to shelter space.
- **Add sprung structures:** so long as there is also a wind-down strategy in place in the future, add more shelter space by adding sprung structures to vacant properties or parking lots of existing facilities.
- **Convert suitable public or private spaces to temporary shelter:** examine use of convention centres or community centres for the purpose of providing overnight shelter.
- **Purchase/rent and convert single family homes into neighbourhood-based shelter options:** add more capacity in neighbourhoods throughout the community by purchasing or renting single family homes for the purpose of shelter, when permissible or made possible through zoning amendments.
- **Use facilities owned by faith-based organizations and service clubs:** appeal to faith-based organizations and service clubs to make use of halls for overnight shelter.
- **Convert transitional housing projects into shelter options:** when displacement is minimal or non-existent, repurpose transitional housing programs as a shelter option or as bridge housing for people already in shelter programs and progressing towards housing.

- **Master lease apartments to use as community-based shelter options:** as has been done to help address homelessness in some high-priced markets in North America, add more capacity by renting apartments and use them as shelter space.

5. People Cannot be Forced to Accept Any Service Offer

People living in encampments maintain autonomy and rights. In the event that shelter capacity is expanded, or there was already adequate space within the shelter system for every person residing outside, there is no mechanism to force people to accept any offer of service, including shelter. This highlights the need to continue working on resolving systemic issues that underlie why people may not view available shelter options as viable, safe and appropriate for them (e.g., lowering barriers to shelter access), while maintaining person-centred, intensive service engagement to customize a service offer that may be appropriate to the person living outside.

6. Supporting Immediate Needs of People in Encampments

Beyond the responsibility of government to ensure people's basic needs are met, service providers, advocacy organizations, volunteers and governmental staff are in a position to engage with people in encampments to understand their most pressing needs for survival and safety. Of particular importance for survival amidst the pandemic, and acknowledging Canadian weather, are as follows:

- **Public health guidelines related to the pandemic:** adequate separation between tents or other structures; access to handwashing; access to masks; access to health care services and testing with follow-up care readily available.
- **Other survival considerations:** access to safely prepared food; access to drinking water; access to seasonally-appropriate clothing; access to protection from the elements; access to a toilet; access to hygiene and harm reduction supplies and facilities.
- **Direct access to emotional and service supports:** on-site access to professionalized staff to navigate access to other services and address housing and shelter needs; advocacy organizations or other volunteers welcome and trusted by people living in encampments.

7. Examine the Existing Homelessness and Re-Housing System of Care

Service and housing options for people living in encampments may be expanded by addressing potential limitations and barriers in the existing system of care. Community leaders will be well-positioned to examine the following, as a minimum, and make improvements when justified:

- **Equity practices in existing services:** ensuring that all services provide services through an anti-oppression lens, centred on racial equity, and appropriate for the unique needs of each person, couple and/or family receiving services to eliminate barriers to service access because of discrimination or alienation in accessing and/or while receiving service because of matters like race, age, ability, language, cognitive functioning, mental illness, addiction, criminal history,

gender, sexual orientation, housing history, income source, employment status, citizenship and/or marital status.

- **Indigenous-specific services:** work to ensure all engagement with Indigenous people living in encampments and engagement with Indigenous-led encampments is culturally appropriate, and is informed by the obligations of governments with regards to reconciliation and decolonization. Where a community has Indigenous-specific services, these agencies should be invited to lead the social service response with Indigenous people, when the Indigenous person in the encampment chooses a culturally specific approach. If a community does not have an Indigenous-specific service provider that can provide this support, and where Indigenous people are living in the encampment, consultation with Indigenous leaders in or near the community can be beneficial.
- **Trauma-informed care:** because of the wide-spread nature of trauma experienced by people who are homeless, supports provided must respect the self-determination and autonomy of participants, build rapport grounded in reciprocity and trust, understand the impact of trauma, and avoiding punitive responses to the indicators of trauma.
- **Shelter capacity:** if there is existing unused shelter space, leaders must ascertain why and develop strategies for improved shelter use amongst people living in encampments, which may require amendments to existing shelter practices for the shelter operator to consider or shelter funders to insist upon. If shelter capacity is already maxed out, consideration needs to be given to adding permanent or temporary shelter capacity while encampments are occurring.
- **Shelter entry barriers:** in communities that have moderate to higher barrier shelters, efforts must be made to reduce those barriers. Examples of barriers include, but are not limited to: requirements of sobriety at entry; separating couples; insufficient storage space; not allowing pets; program participation requirements; and, expected religious practice participation or religious iconography in the shelter building.
- **Monitoring shelter outflow:** part of the response to encampments must include appropriately housing people currently in shelters to free up space.
- **Continued efforts to espouse a social service -not social control - orientation:** in communities where homelessness services providers are not aligned with having a person-centred, strength-based approach to serving and housing people, and grounded in Housing First, consideration must be given to amending these services or reinvesting resources from these services to other providers that are aligned with reducing and ending homelessness.
- **Constant review of service restrictions or service banning practices:** an examination of service restrictions or banning from homelessness services is warranted, especially if some of the people in encampments are not welcome at any of the shelter options in the community.

- **Street outreach capacity:** to respond to people experiencing outdoor homelessness, it is necessary to have well-functioning street outreach services – either as professional street outreach workers or allied professionals that are being asked to perform street outreach activities. Expanding street outreach capacity - and its professionalized delivery - that has an orientation towards solutions and reducing and ending homelessness is critical. What’s needed is sufficient capacity to engage with a smaller group of people intensely to resolve their homelessness rather than working with a larger group of people peripherally but not having time to work through the painstaking process of ending homelessness.
- **Day service capacity:** to help address immediate needs of people living in encampments (access to hygiene, food, clothing, etc.) the work of street outreach should be complemented by work to ensure day services are available and easily accessed by people living in encampments.
- **Coordinated Access:** the community may need to consider amendments to the Coordinated Access process. In particular, a community may consider:
 - Expanding mobile access points to be included in Coordinated Access – ensure street outreach providers are capable of being intake points for Coordinated Access, or bring assessors and access personnel into the field;
 - Prioritizing unsheltered homelessness in the community – one of the prioritization variables a community can name is unsheltered homelessness, usually with a caveat on length of time unsheltered (e.g., prioritized if unsheltered 6 or more months out of the last 12 months); and,
 - Proportional allocation of available spots on caseloads or vacancies for people living in encampments – transparently setting aside a percentage of all available housing units or space on housing caseloads for people living outside that meet eligibility and prioritization protocols.
- **Existing investments in services:** local, provincial/territorial and federal dollars for homelessness are used for a wide variety of programs and services throughout the country. Not all of these are aligned to ending homelessness. Tough decisions may be needed regarding defunding some legacy programs and services not directly related to ending homelessness to re-invest in encampment response.
- **Social Housing prioritization and access:** some communities across the country have demonstrated that social housing, through modified chronological access, can be a huge benefit in responding effectively to homelessness. In addition, some communities have reprofiled part of the existing social housing portfolio to operate in a manner more consistent with supportive housing. Other communities may learn from this experience and make amendments to their

local social housing access and/or begin operating part of the local social housing portfolio as supportive housing.

- **Access to harm reduction outreach, education and supplies, including overdose prevention supports:** for people using substances that live in encampments, the community must assess access to harm reduction outreach, education and supplies, and ensure that these are made available through existing resources or expanding harm reduction services and supports for people in encampments.
- **Access to health, mental health and addiction supports** – some people living in encampments will have compromised wellness that will benefit from access to more intensive supports for health, mental health and/or addiction supports. These can be provided in tandem with efforts to help the person living in the encampment secure housing with appropriate supports, or safe interim options.

8. Leadership

A clearly defined leadership entity (individual or agency) should be empowered to build a coalition of entities that have an interest in supporting the current encampment residents and resolving outdoor homelessness, all the while providing a response framed in a rights-based and housing-focused approach. Developing responses to homelessness encampments is impossible without functional, clear leadership. A summary of items to accomplish – a checklist of activities and considerations – is provided in Appendix A. Communities benefit from considering the following:

- **Appointed leader representing government interests:** the appropriate political body in the jurisdiction (municipal council, regional council, county council, provincial/territorial body) should name and support a person within the public service or community-based sector to build a team to engage the encampment, plan, organize, understand and adequately coordinate the response.
- **Key representatives:** a broad cross-section of actors is of benefit to adequately address the needs of people living in encampments, mitigate safety concerns, and work to provide an intensive social service response. Amongst these are people with lived experience and peer-led organizations, equity experts, street outreach workers, advocacy organizations, cultural leaders, lawyers, police, fire, bylaw, and others. Appendix B outlines types of people to consider and potential roles.
- **Identifying, respecting and engaging existing leadership within the encampment:** when an existing leadership structure exists within the encampment, this should be leveraged in relations with the encampment. These encampment leaders may be people who live in the encampment, but can also be or include housed people that are supporting people in the encampment, including formerly housed persons, lawyers, service providers, or other advocates.

- **Centralized information repository:** there is benefit to having one location where all information is retained regarding any particular encampments or all encampments within a jurisdiction. This is for the purpose of service-rich engagement that is driven by knowledge and data, not for the purposes of surveillance for enforcement purposes.
- **Naming the problem to be solved:** there needs to be clear articulation of what is in scope of the response to encampments (for example, helping as many people in encampments access housing as possible) and what is out of scope (for example, fixing chronic underfunding of income supports).

9. Sustained Response

Meeting the needs of people living in encampments may require a dedicated and sustained response. The following activities should be considered:

- **Convene a Service Response Table:** The community leader of the local service response to encampments, should convene a collaborative body to:
 - a) Keep track of all encampments in a community;
 - b) Plan for an intensive service response to the needs of the people living in the encampment.

At the discretion of the leader of the service response for encampment residents, the response table is likely to include some or all of the entities described in Appendix B.

- **Mobilize Resources:** Street outreach needs to occur at the site. These activities can be completed by trained peers, professional street outreach *workers*, or people knowledgeable of homelessness who are seconded to undertake street outreach *activities* within a rights-based and housing-focused framework. Street outreach may engage with other organizations, advocates or volunteers already working with and supporting people in the encampment. To ensure people's basic needs are being properly met, it may be necessary to supplement equipment at an encampment such as handwashing stations. Resources should be mobilized based upon an assessment of needs.
- **Know the Encampment Residents, Structures and Pets/Service Animals:** "Nothing about us without us" remains paramount in the service response. Collaborating directly with people living in encampments, or where there are issues with trust or access, working with the leadership of the encampment or others that speak on behalf of the encampment:
 - Build rapport and trust
 - Understand personal and encampment-wide needs for safety and survival

- With consent, collect and securely store information that will prove to be important for enhancing re-housing services for each person in the encampment that has expressed an interest in being housed and supported through the re-housing and homelessness response system:
 - Name
 - Aliases
 - Date of birth
 - Individual, couple or family
 - Length of homelessness
 - Homeless services still currently used (e.g., drop-in centre)
 - Homeless services previously used (e.g., which shelter they used to stay at most frequently)
 - Income source(s)
 - Total income amount
 - Identification by type of identification
 - Observed/suspected emotional, physical or sexual abuse so that supports can be provided
 - Whether or not they interested in working with a service agency of their choosing to explore housing options
 - Whether or not they will accept offers of available shelter options
 - Immediate barriers to housing (such as documentation needs) to be resolved
 - Pet(s)/service animals
 - Description of structure (e.g., colour and location of tent)

- Complete an encampment-wide assessment and personal assessment for each person in the encampment to ensure the mobilization of a service response that is appropriate (examples are included in Appendix C)

- Map out where each known encampment is located throughout the community, and map out each large encampment (10 or more people), as necessary subdividing larger encampments into sub areas to know and provide service (see Appendix D)

- With permission and consent, and only once people are known by name, cross reference with:
 - By-Name List
 - HIFIS/HMIS to understand services used currently or in the past
 - Street outreach caseload lists

- Monitor revisions to the volume of people on the site to ensure that services and supports are appropriate

- Flag instances where people may be in unsafe situations where further follow-up would be beneficial
- Know how many structures are in the encampment
- Know the general condition of the structures
- Identify structures where there may be safety issues that can be remedied with support (e.g., too close when physical distancing measures are considered; proximity to fire; in a flood plain)
- Work to ensure people living in encampments have access to the supplies and services to maintain the health of their pets. Know the number and types of animals on the site, and when necessary, activate services and supports to provide additional care for the well-being of pets and service animals on the site (not to apprehend the animal)
- To improve service responses to the residents of encampments, prepare dashboards with at-a-glance understanding of all encampments in the community and the needs of any particular encampment (see Appendix E for examples). These dashboards must align with trauma-informed protocols of transparency, accountability, and privacy expectations. As with all Canadians, individuals residing in encampments remain the owners of their personal information and service agencies/community partners must be responsible stewards in their data collection and sharing processes.

This is not an exercise in surveillance; it is an exercise in service planning. Information collected should not be used for policing or enforcement purposes.

10. Considerations in the Event of Closure

An encampment that closes as a result of every person in the encampment voluntarily accessing housing or other temporary services is the ideal outcome for an encampment. All other types of closure would meet the definition of forced evictions, as described in the *National Protocol*. Many communities may be facing scenarios where due to local by-laws, municipal/regional government bodies are actioning encampment closures. Although it is impossible to identify all of the issues, concerns, responses to outdoor homelessness in communities across the country, closures of encampments should always be completed in accordance with the law and the *right to housing* (e.g., appropriate and adequate housing and shelter options were identified as the primary response), and always with a transparent deliberation process that actively involves the people living at the encampment. To be consistent with the *right to housing* and applicable law, an encampment cannot be closed simply because of pressure from outside actors who deem the encampment to be unsightly or bothersome.

For consideration:

Identify the reason being identified in the call for the closure: ensure that this is discussed at the table convened to respond to encampments and inclusive of people living in the encampment.

- **Review that all activities and efforts were consistent with a *right to housing*:** efforts to help people access appropriate housing has been thorough and exhaustive, and when necessary, suitable interim options like safe, appropriate shelter have been put into practice for people that want with this interim option.
- **Identify the legal justification proposed for the closure:** name the authority that is being used to force closure of the encampment.
- **If closure plans move forward in your community, ensure transparency and adequately communicate closure procedures:** try to provide as much lead time as possible (e.g., a month), such that supports have enough time to increase their efforts as necessary, but also to organize all of the different parties and logistics that are necessary to close an encampment.
- **Prepare and post notice:** ensure the notice is posted at multiple locations throughout the encampment. Consider including the following on the notice:
 - The specific bylaw or other legal basis that is identified as providing authority to close the site;
 - The date on or after the closure will occur;
 - The area that is subject to closure (e.g., within 250 metres of the any posted closure sign, in all directions);
 - That materials found on site on the day of closure may be considered abandoned;
 - If storage is being made available, how that process occurs and how long items will be stored;
 - Objects of obvious value (e.g., photographs, identification, money, prescriptions) that are left in plain sight will be collected and stored for a specified period of time (subject to local storage policy), and how to retrieve those items;
 - That the site will be secured and inaccessible once the closure begins, and reopened after;
 - How to contact street outreach or other relevant social service agencies;
 - Who to contact to get further information about the closure process.
- **Increase street outreach and re-housing support efforts:** increase support efforts around the time the notice is posted, which usually results in distress and many questions.
- **Have and implement a communication strategy:** posting notice often leads to inquiries from a range of government bodies, as well as media. A spokesperson for the encampment service response should be prepared to engage with multiple interests.
- **Organize logistics of relevant local, as well as provincial/territorial bodies:** various departments all need to be coordinated and on the same page of what is occurring and when.

Some of these entities (e.g., enforcement bodies) may benefit from advanced training on homelessness, cultural safety, and trauma-informed approaches.

- **Organize removal of 3rd party property on the site:** if the likes of handwashing stations have been provided to the site, these will need to be removed by the 3rd party vendor.
- **Identify appropriate shelter, drop-in or other community space for residents of the encampment for the date and time of closure:** people in the encampment may be traumatized and in need of support services as a result of the closure. Having a safe place to provide the support, debrief and continue to explore shelter options is necessary.
- **Provide bags/totes for people in encampment to pack their belongings:** in the days leading up to closure, as well as on the day of the closure, providing large bags or plastic totes for people in the encampment to pack up belongings is necessary.
- **Arrange animal assistance organizations to be present if there are pets or service animals in need of service:** these organizations can provide access to everything from food for animals to leashes, kennels, and in some instances even boarding for a limited time.
- **Provide transportation assistance:** ensure that there is transportation available to assist people in getting to the shelter or drop-in centre, or other facility, that is being used to provide support and debrief to people impacted by the closure.
- **Review the site for items of value that are in plain sight:** without opening any bags or boxes, an entity may be tasked with collecting, tagging and preparing for storage, any items of obvious value such as photographs, identification, medication, phones, and money. Photographing or videotaping this process can be helpful to increase transparency and a record of activities, in the interest of all parties.
- **Store items of obvious value that were found in plain sight:** off-site, at a designated location that is relatively easy to get to, all items of value are stored. The community should have a local storage location and policy related to storage practices and length of time items will be stored. All organizations involved in assisting people that were living in the encampment can assist them with recovering these items at a later date.
- **Close the encampment and then open the location again:** once the site review is completed, the storage of items is completed, people have had the chance to remove belongings, and people remaining at the encampment have been offered services off-site, the location can be opened again.

11. Conclusion

The most appropriate response for people living in encampments is to focus on housing as the solution, with adequate supports as necessary. Engagement with encampments should have this goal. To be able to do that, many communities will need to expand housing options and possibly interim shelter options as well.

Any action taken with people in an encampment must be consistent with the *right to housing* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. People who are homeless do not surrender their rights. To respond appropriately to the needs of people living in an encampment, emphasis must be placed on a coordinated, intensive service response. When there is appointed community leadership to undertake this process, a coalition of entities can be involved in addressing all aspects of the encampment. People living in the encampment will be the most essential members in this community deliberation and response process. Through service data, planning can plot the most effective response and deployment of social services resources, and mitigation can begin without enforcement.

Closure of an encampment should only occur once all residents have been provided with appropriate housing or shelter. If deemed to be appropriate from a legal perspective, forced closures may occur prior to the housing needs of all encampment residents being appropriately met. Sensitivity to the trauma likely caused by such an experience must be weighed against any local desire to see the encampment closed.

1. Appendix A – Encampment Preparation and Response Checklist for Community Leaders

Pre-Planning

- Appoint a leader for planning, communications and engaging key, diverse interests
- Identify key representatives of various interests to participate in encampment service and response (e.g., residents of the encampment, advocacy organizations, social service providers, bylaw, equity experts, funders, harm reduction experts, etc.)
- Understand the right to housing, applicable aspects of the *Charter*, and local legal considerations that inform how to respond to encampments
- Identify and implement strategies to increase access to existing housing stock
- Advocate, plan and support more affordable housing development
- Identify and implement strategies to increase shelter system capacity, if necessary

Planning

- Convene a response table
- Ensure all relevant direct line staff from any department or agency that will have direct engagement with people living in encampments is appropriately trained
- Ensure all relevant information is held confidentially and in one secure location for planning and response purposes
- Identify the housing focused mission and human rights based approach for a particular encampment or all encampments in the community
- Identify and secure funding/budget allocation for encampment response
- Identify and liaise with leadership within or representing the encampment(s)
- Develop an initial communication strategy

Mobilizing a housing-focused, trauma-informed service approach

- Mobilize professionalized street outreach resources
- Address immediate survival needs
- Ensure there is emotional and social supports
- Know people living in encampments by name, and their needs, to understand the population of people to be supported
- Know the structures in the encampment and a general description and condition of each
- Identify the number of service animals and pets on the site
- Complete the encampment assessment
- Map each encampment and the location of all encampments for the purposes of organizing the social service response and tracking supports and deploying resources (not for surveillance)

- Cross-match, with consent, data from the encampment to the By-Name List and HIFIS/HMIS to help inform service delivery
- For people living in the encampment that have not already participated in local Coordinated Access assessment process, seek consent to participate, and complete Coordinated Access tools and strategies
- If necessary based upon street outreach engagement, have a health safety assessment completed at the encampment, with recommendations of how to improve health and/or decrease or remove risks, and implement recommendations accordingly
- Prepare dashboards for each encampment and all encampments
- Update communication strategy

IF the community moves forward with a forced closure of the encampment, intensify service response to support residents of the encampment prior to and during the closure

- Move as many people from the encampment to housing as possible
- Offer safe and appropriate emergency accommodation in shelter for any person unable to access housing
- In the event of required closure, bring together all relevant parties to discuss transparently
- Communicate intentions to close with people living in the encampment
- Post notice of the anticipated closure
- Increase social service response
- Organize logistics for closure
- When there is appropriate, transparent legal justification – and preferably after all support efforts have been exhausted – close the encampment
- Update communication strategy

2. Appendix B – Entities Providing Input and Guidance

Entity	Role(s)
Equity Expert	<i>Provide an impartial view to ensure work with encampments is rooted in an anti-oppression framework (e.g., anti-racist; anti-ageist); may liaise with community cultural experts depending on the racial or ethnic identity of encampment residents, as appropriate.</i>
Income Support Staff	<i>Examine income and benefit situation of people living in encampments; (re)instate income supports as appropriate and as the person is eligible; explore use of discretionary funding on a case by case basis to assist with moving into housing.</i>
Street Outreach Service Provider(s)	<i>Frequent contact (often daily or multiple times per day) with people living in encampments; identify and know the population; structure inventory; lead of case planning with each person in the encampment to focus on housing or other service options; ensuring the person in the encampment is on the Coordinated Access list if they wish to be housed through the local re-housing and homelessness response system; getting people living in the encampment “paper ready” for housing</i>
Service Manager/ CBO/ Funder(s)/ Grant Manager(s) of Homeless Services	<i>Recommending and allocating additional funding for encampment response; overseeing the contracts and services of homeless service providers that are involved in responding to the encampment; measuring performance of contracted agencies responding to the encampment</i>
Coordinated Access	<i>If not part of the Service Manager/CBO/Funder, a representative of Coordinated Access is necessary to know which people in the encampment are on the community’s By-Name List, who needs to be added to the list, and where each person in the encampment is at in terms of the community’s priority sequence of housing people with supports</i>

Public Health	<i>Assessment and mitigation recommendations for public health risks encountered at an encampment; may recommend/coordinate hygiene equipment (e.g., portable toilets, handwashing stations) at an encampment; primary liaison with other health professionals that may be needed at the site to address specific health issues of people living in an encampment.</i>
Fire Department	<i>Fire safety assessment and mitigation recommendations for risks encountered at an encampment</i>
Parks Staff	<i>Environmental assessment and mitigation recommendations for risks to park operations, facilities or natural features encountered at an encampment.</i>
Corporate Communications	<i>Craft and manage internal and external communications; prepare backgrounders; prepare key messages; respond and manage media requests; may be the spokesperson for the response to an encampment</i>
Information Technology	<i>Data management; mapping/GIS assistance</i>
Advocacy Organizations	<i>Supporting, advocating for, communicating with, and organizing people living in encampments.</i>
Peers or Persons with Lived Experience/ Expertise	<i>Engaging with people living in encampments; training and advising professionals involved in the encampment on the experience of homelessness and navigating the homelessness response system.</i>
Shelter Provider(s)	<i>Work to identify appropriate shelter space within their community to support people living in encampments; when appropriate, examine operating a surge (temporary) shelter facility; amending rules, policies or service restrictions – or any other barriers – to shelter access to better accommodate people living in encampments.</i>
Indigenous Service Provider(s)	<i>Providing culturally appropriate supports to Indigenous people living in encampments, and connecting to Indigenous-specific services if requested</i>

<p>Social Housing Waiting List/ Centralized Access</p>	<p><i>Assist with new applications for social housing in the community; troubleshoot past social housing stays of people living in encampments that did not have a positive outcome; update social housing applications; seeing if any people living in encampments meet priority criteria for faster access to social housing; providing an update to the leader and service providers on the status of where each encampment occupant is at on the social housing waiting list; amend local social housing access policy (with appropriate government approval) to better serve unsheltered homeless individuals/couples.</i></p>
<p>Housing Locators</p>	<p><i>When necessary, provide listings of places for rent within the community to either other helping professionals on the site or engaging directly with people living in encampments to help them understand and achieve local housing opportunities independent or through Coordinated Access.</i></p>
<p>Urban/ Environmental Planner</p>	<p><i>Provide an assessment of whether an encampment is an environmentally sensitive area or floodplain, and providing recommendations on mitigation, as appropriate.</i></p>
<p>Mental Health Practitioners</p>	<p><i>Provide (additional) supports and navigation to mental health services, if needed, for people living in encampments.</i></p>
<p>Addiction Specialists/ Harm Reduction Worker</p>	<p><i>Provide (additional) supports and harm reduction supplies – including Naloxone, safer consumption materials (“Works”), sharps containers at the site if needed, as well as navigation of addiction counselling, detox, treatment and harm reduction resources for people living in encampments, if needed.</i></p>
<p>Cultural Leaders</p>	<p><i>Provide culturally appropriate supports to people living in encampments when appropriate; providing appropriate historical and cultural teachings and advice to professionals involved in responding to the encampment</i></p>
<p>Lawyers</p>	<p><i>Provide legal representation to people living in an encampment for encampment or other related matters that may be preventing the person/couple from accessing housing.</i></p>

<p>Representatives from Elected Officials</p>	<p><i>In some jurisdictions, the Mayor's office, council members, MLA/MPP, or MP offices may want to be briefed and kept in the loop on what is occurring in the response to an encampment. In some instances, municipal elected officials may want to be involved in decisions regarding the encampment management and response. Municipal representatives may need to vote on and make available additional resources for the encampment response.</i></p>
<p>Representative(s) from Neighbourhood Associations</p>	<p><i>Where a neighbourhood has a particular interest in an encampment (either through compassion or complaint), it can be helpful to keep a representative from the neighbourhood association briefed on the response efforts.</i></p>
<p>Representative(s) from Business Associations</p>	<p><i>Where a business association has a particular interest in an encampment (either through compassion or complaint), it can be helpful to keep a representative from the business association briefed on the response efforts.</i></p>
<p>Faith Leaders</p>	<p><i>Provide spiritual support to people living in encampments and the staff involved in the planning and mitigation an encampment; mobilizing volunteers and resources.</i></p>

3. Appendix C – Encampment Assessment

		Y	N
ENCAMPMENT-WIDE ASSESSMENT			
Degree of Organization	Permanent or semi-permanent structures		
	Prepared for most weather eventualities		
	Trash managed		
	Absence of hoarding/extreme collecting		
People & Pets	Minors on the site		
	<i>If YES to minors on site, are they with a legal guardian or parent</i>		
	Pets on site		
	<i>If YES to pets on site, are they in good condition</i>		
	<i>If YES to pets on site, are their food and water needs attended to</i>		
	One or more people on site are pregnant		
Ability to Meet Daily Needs	Access to potable water on or near the site		
	Access to a toilet on or near the site		
	Access to a shower on or near the site		
	Access to food on or near the site		
	Safe storage of food		
	Safe preparation of food		
	Access to new/clean clothing near the site		
	Access to laundry facilities near the site		
Presence of Hazards and Risks	Sharps/needles on the ground or otherwise not stored properly		
	Broken glass on the ground		
	Propane tanks on site		
	Meth production on or near the site		
	Drug dealing on site		
	Exploitive sex work on site		
	Domestic violence on site		
	Sexual violence on site		
	Other types of violence on site		
	Stolen property on site		
	Abetting others on site		
	Interfering with the public right of way		
	Encampment residents wear masks when unable to keep two-meter separation from others		
	COVID distance measures are maintained between dwellings in the encampment		

Conflicts on Site or Related to the Site	A known conflict with another encampment that is threatening the survival of the encampment		
	A known conflict with business or neighbours in the area that is threatening the survival of the encampment or the safety of neighbours		
	A known plan by by-law, abatement, and/or law enforcement to close the encampment		
ASSESSMENT WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL IN THE ENCAMPMENT			
Reasons for Disengagement from Shelter	Has used shelter one or more nights in the past year		
	Barred/service restricted from shelter		
	Claims a negative shelter experience		
	Claims to be unable to meet shelter rules		
	Has daily routines that make it impossible to enter shelter		
	Not using shelter to avoid conflict with staff or other guests		
Income & History of Housing	Has a monthly income of \$1,000 or more from all sources (formal and informal sources of income)		
	Has been housed previously in the community 6 or more months within the last three years		
	If NO to being housed in the community the encampment is located within, has been housed in a different community 6 or more months within the last three years		

4. Appendix D – Responding to Larger Encampments in Smaller Sections

	1	2	3	4
A				
B				
C				
D				

5. Appendix E – Encampment Data Dashboards

SAMPLE ENCAMPMENT DASHBOARD

Location of encampment (street address, park name, GPS coordinates, Ward/neighbourhood)	
Date encampment was first detected	
Number of unique individuals on site this week:	
Number of unique individuals on site last week:	
% change week over week	
Number of structures on site this week:	
Number of structures on site last week:	
% change week over week	
Number of people housed from the encampment this week:	
Number of people housed from the encampment last week:	
Number of people housed from the encampment to date:	
KEY NOTES (incidents, assessments, proposed closure date, etc.)	

SAMPLE SYSTEM DASHBOARD ON ENCAMPMENTS

Total number of encampments in the municipality this week:	
Total number of encampments in the municipality last week:	
% change week over week	
Total number of people in encampments this week:	
Total number of people in encampments last week:	
% change week over week	
Number of encampments voluntarily ending this week:	
Number of encampments forced to close this week:	
Number of people housed from encampments this week:	
Number of people housed from encampments last week:	
Number of people housed from encampments year to date:	
KEY NOTES	