

## Winnipeg Street Census 2022 - Recommendations

### Systems Change

Given that 68.2% of respondents were Indigenous and come from across Canada, settlement services akin to those we provide to newcomers to Canada should also be provided to ensure that those who have had to move from their home communities to the city for education, employment and even natural disasters are aware of and able to access necessary supports and services. It should be understood that this would need to be an Indigenous-led initiative.

There are organizations that specialize in providing transitional services for Indigenous people relocating to Winnipeg. Examples include Manitoba Friendship Centres and Eagle Urban Transition Centre (EUTC), a program under the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. The government must support EUTC to expand their services.

We also recognize that there are push and pull factors of transitioning. Consistently, if people are relocating from their First Nations to Winnipeg, then it means their needs are not being met within their Nations. The federal and provincial governments should partner with First Nations governments to invest in enhancing capacity to offer various services that others would get in urban centres.

Given that 50.2% of respondents reported involvement with Child and Family Services and that a large number first became homeless at an age when they are transitioning from CFS care, a spectrum of transitional supports and strategies are needed for youth exiting Child and Family Services along with anyone exiting Corrections or Health Services by building on existing community based support services. The CFS system must move away from one that emphasises apprehensions into state care and towards one that builds on community supports, both formal (i.e.: community based organizations) and informal (i.e.: within extended family and friends) to strengthen families and avoid the family breakdown that follows from state apprehensions. Given that family breakdown, issues with addiction, housing, income, health and mental health remain the dominant responses as to why people first became and remain homeless, create a coordinated intake and assessment system that supports a 'no wrong door policy' to ensure people do not get 'lost' by being directed, redirected and misdirected through our various governmental systems. This should include on-line access to all services from emergency shelters to transitional and long-term housing and expanded to include all housing supports and services.

Given again the complexity of issues listed above that lead people into and trap them in homelessness, all levels of government and their departments must align their policies and strategies so that no more than 30% of one's income is spent on safe and sustainable housing. This includes creating new supply of affordable and especially Rent-Geared to Income housing, as well as the increase of rental allowance programs such as Rent Assist. The current level of Rent Assist support should be raised from 77% of median market rent to 100%.

Given that Employment and Income Assistance was listed by 55.5% of respondents as a source of income, it is clear that the current level of support is not adequate. EIA should move away for subsistence only levels of support and raise the maximum a person can earn on a monthly basis before future benefits are garnished. Moreover, given that nearly half of respondents do not receive EIA, barriers to entry should be reduced. Critically wait times to entry to the program must be minimized to prevent people becoming homeless while waiting for assistance.

Given that 53.9% of respondents were not able to complete high school, with 23.7% not having any high school education at all, there is a clear link between education and homelessness. The

education system, therefore, must be recognized and supported as an ideal opportunity for prevention and intervention of homelessness through supportive family strengthening programming, life skills and employment training.

Given that these findings demonstrate that health, mental health and addictions are inextricably linked to homelessness, an increase to services both governmental and community based, that adhere to harm reduction approaches, that address the variety of unique needs of those struggling to find safe and sustainable housing is essential. An interim step would be to create safe transitional housing for those awaiting treatment.

## **Housing Supply**

The solution to homelessness is housing. Even though Indigenous peoples constitute about 14% of Winnipeg's population, they are over-represented in homelessness. Also, the research found that Indigenous people are less likely to access shelters and transitional housing. Therefore, there is a need for the three levels of government to invest in low-income, low-barrier, and Indigenous-led housing. This investment should be made soon as we already have a housing supply deficit. End Homelessness Winnipeg tracks housing supply in Winnipeg. Based on the [2021 report](#), Winnipeg lost 881 (6%) social housing units from 2019 to 2021. However, in [End Homelessness Winnipeg's 5-Year Plan to End Homelessness](#) in the city, it was recommended that Winnipeg add 470 more social housing units to the existing stock. Combined this leads to a shortfall of at least 1351 needed units which must be made up over the next 3 years if Winnipeg is to meet this goal.

Given that poor housing conditions were also cited by respondents as a reason for experiencing homelessness and "affordable" housing, meaning in good condition with rent they could afford while maintaining other necessities (i.e.: food, clothing etc...), was the frequently cited pathway out of homelessness, the Government of Manitoba must take full advantage of the federal housing strategy by ensuring funds are directed towards the creation of housing that is affordable for people on EIA and others with similarly low incomes.

Given the wide ranging and complex reasons facing people experiencing homelessness, a variety of housing supply options are needed. Social housing and/or rent geared to income must include more:

- Larger units to accommodate a variety of family compositions
- Seniors (including more publically funded personal care homes)
- Youth living independently
- Rapid re-housing and/or transitional housing
- Supportive housing for people no longer in full treatment but still need in-house supports to maintain stable housing.

Given that renovations, evictions and conflicts with landlords were a factor cited by 17.3% of respondents, the Government of Manitoba should strengthen existing Residential Tenancy Act to better protect tenants, as well as take measures to reduce the influence of financialization in Manitoba's housing market.

Some of the reasons the respondents provided for losing their housing are substance use, mental and physical health issues, and trauma. The Housing First program addresses the issues above by housing those experiencing homelessness first and then, treating the associated problems above. The Reaching Home program being administered by End Homelessness Winnipeg housed 442 people experiencing chronic homelessness in the 2021/22 fiscal year through the Housing First program. The provincial government should further invest in the Housing First program.

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The Winnipeg Street Census wishes to acknowledge that our recommendations are neither exhaustive nor new. They build on the recommendations from the previous Winnipeg Street Census reports, and the work of other coalitions and organizations such as Make Poverty History Manitoba, Right to Housing, Here & Now: Winnipeg's Plan to End Youth Homelessness, Campaign 2000, End Homelessness Winnipeg, the Government of Manitoba's report on Child and Family Services Opportunities to Improve Outcomes for Children and Youth and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. We offer this report and recommendations as further proof that we must all identify and invest in systemic and societal changes if we are ever to truly end homelessness.