



**City of Surrey Homelessness Prevention + Response Plan**  
**WHAT WE HEARD ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT**  
DECEMBER 2023

## Prepared for

City of Surrey

13450 – 104 Avenue

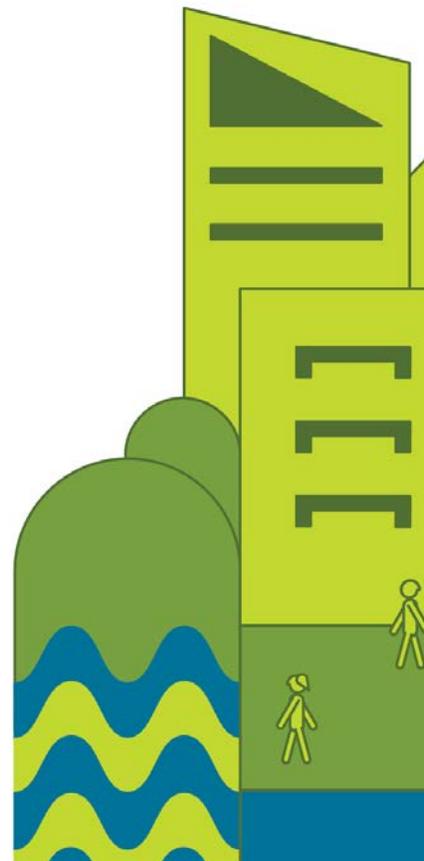
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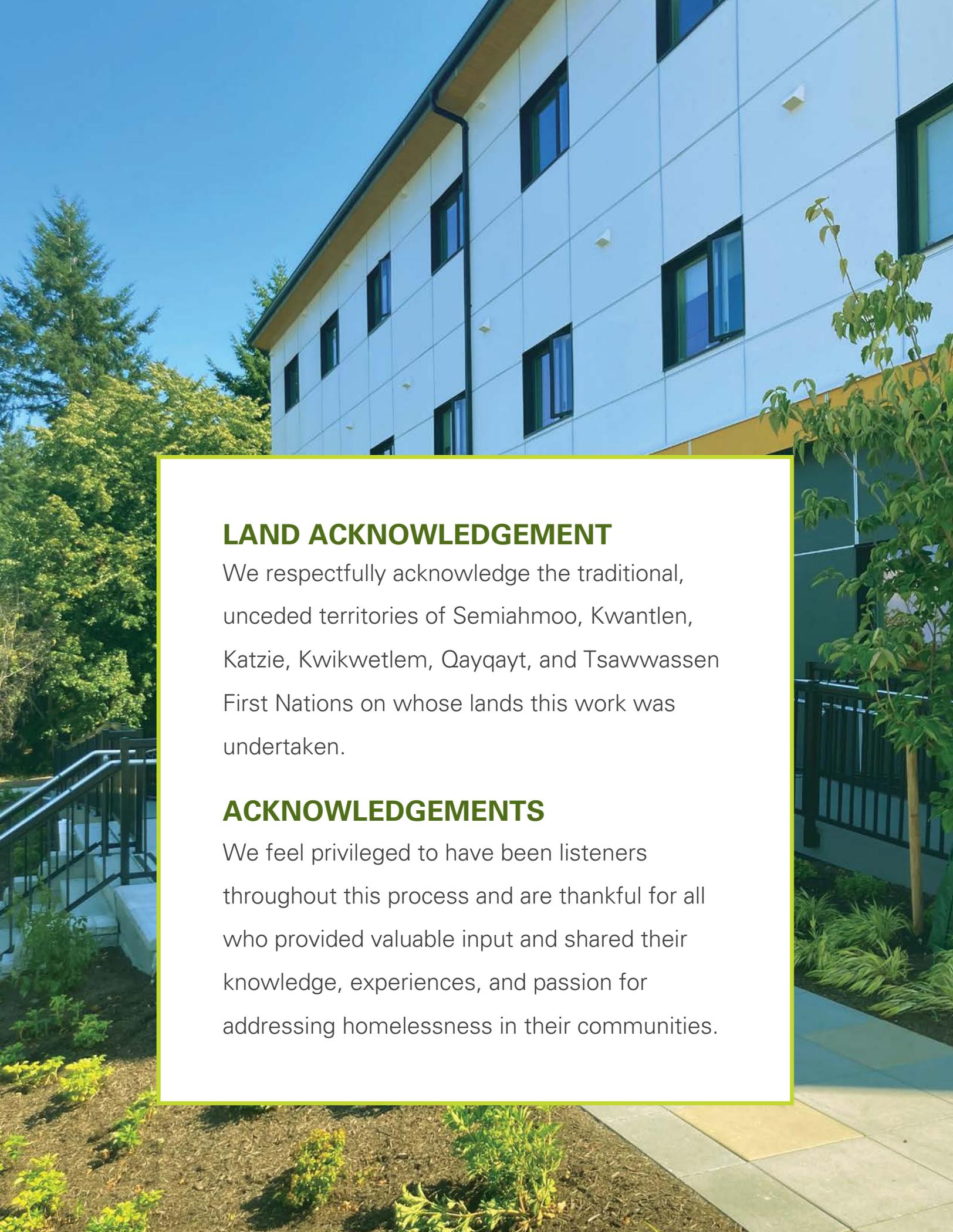
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## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional, unceded territories of Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, and Tsawwassen First Nations on whose lands this work was undertaken.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We feel privileged to have been listeners throughout this process and are thankful for all who provided valuable input and shared their knowledge, experiences, and passion for addressing homelessness in their communities.

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Surrey Mayor and Council authorized the development of a *Homelessness Prevention and Response Plan* to replace the 10-year-old *Master Plan for Housing the Homeless*. Engagement was undertaken to listen and learn from participants, build on quantitative data, and inform the plan. A variety of engagement events were implemented in Summer–Fall 2023. Engagement events included in-person workshops, sensitive listening interviews with people with living and lived expertise, key informant interviews, and focus groups.

This Engagement Summary Report highlights the feedback received from people with living and lived experience of homelessness, frontline and outreach workers, social service providers, government partners, immigrant serving agencies, and the business community.

Acknowledging that relevant research has recently been undertaken in Surrey, this Report also incorporates the findings of the following two reports: Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee’s *Finding Our Way Home: Research on Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* (2022) and Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group’s *In Their Own Words* (2023).

**IN TOTAL, ENGAGEMENT EVENTS REACHED 176 PEOPLE INCLUDING 147 REPRESENTATIVES FROM SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES, GOVERNMENT PARTNERS, FRONTLINE WORKERS, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, AND IMMIGRANT SERVING AGENCIES, AND 29 PEOPLE WITH LIVING AND LIVED EXPERTISE.**



The **objectives** of the engagement process were to:

- Inform stakeholders, partners, and the public about the development of a new Homelessness Plan in Surrey;
- Listen and learn from equity-deserving groups and people with lived and living experience of homelessness to improve understanding of the issues and identify potential solutions that are responsive to unique and diverse needs;
- Engage with local groups including homelessness services providers, affordable housing sector, business sector, provincial and federal funding partners and ministries, Fraser Health Authority, Indigenous organizations, and other key informants; and
- Address data gaps through collection of qualitative information to understand the level of community need for housing and homelessness services.



# WHAT WE HEARD – HIGHLIGHTS



## HOUSING

- The **rising cost of rent means housing has become unaffordable** for many people, especially for those earning fixed incomes or that rely on benefits.
- More people are staying at emergency shelters or hospitals for extended periods due to a lack of transitional housing options and reluctance or inability to move on.  
**Emergency shelters are not a long-term housing solution.**
- **Pathways into homelessness are varied, complex, and interrelated**, including family conflict, depression or trauma, separation from a partner or marriage breakdown, domestic violence, rent price increases, surgery, pressure by landlords, substance use, mental illness, fraud, and building fire damage.
- **There is a lack of all housing types across the network**; diverse housing types are needed, including non-market housing, housing for families, urban Indigenous households, women and children, seniors and people with complex health needs, youth, low-income immigrants/refugees, emergency shelters, supportive housing, transitional housing, and market rental.
- **Non-market housing is needed in all Surrey neighbourhoods**, not only in City Centre.
- **Accessibility to transit and proximity to services** is a vital consideration when locating new housing.
- **Stigma and NIMBYism is prevalent** and represents a barrier to people accessing housing and services.
- **Collaborative solutions and partnerships are recommended** to facilitate more housing.





## INTEGRATED HEALTH AND HOUSING

- People experiencing or at-risk of homelessness face **barriers to accessing health services** and are more likely to access in-house or mobile services.
- A **new model of assisted living is needed** for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness with substance use challenges who have health needs which are not being met.
- A range of **health services are needed in shelters and supportive housing** including medication support, mental health services, general health check-ups, youth-specific clinics, sexual health, substance use support, psychiatrist, dental, physiotherapy, pre- and post-natal support, and physical health and nutrition programs.
- Adopting a **client-centred, trauma-informed approach** is recommended for housing with embedded health supports.
- **More collaboration** is needed between health, housing, and other related sectors.



## SUPPORT SERVICES

- In addition to health service gaps noted, there are **gaps in other key support services** in Surrey including a lack of social infrastructure, counselling, tenant support including rent and eviction support, transit passes, life skills, food security, and employment programs.
- **Culturally-sensitive supports** are needed that acknowledge the needs of diverse populations.
- Service sector staff and frontline workers experience daily stress due to **lack of experience, limited training, and adequate support.**
- Service hubs should be **located in every neighbourhood** – offering a range of services including housing and health supports. Collaboration with multiple organizations and partners will be needed to implement service hubs.





## PREVENTION

- **People are most vulnerable and at-risk of homelessness during transitions in their lives.** Greater involvement, support, and communication is needed between different organizations, youth and adult services, and departments to ensure a smooth transition.

- **People struggle to navigate the system to access housing and support services.** A straightforward system where

information is centralized would help people access resources faster.





# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Figure 1: Engagement at-a-Glance



## ENGAGEMENT

An Engagement Strategy was developed to outline engagement activities proposed as part of the Homelessness Plan process. The Strategy was shared with the Advisory Committee for input to ensure a diversity of voices was heard to represent the needs and perspectives of the Surrey community.

Engagement activities included **4 in-person workshops**, **29 interviews** with people with lived and living experience of homelessness, **2 focus groups** (one with **members of the business community** and one with **10 immigrant/newcomer serving non-profit societies** working in Surrey), and **2 key informant interviews** with non-profit societies in Surrey.

Alongside the engagement activities, meetings took place with an Advisory Committee and Cross-Departmental City Staff at key milestones of the Homelessness Plan process. The City of Surrey website has also shared content on the planning process.

The project team also attended the Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group Community Forum in July 2023 to learn from the group's research and inform participants about the Homelessness Plan.

The following sections outline the methods utilized for each engagement activity.



## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

At the start of the Homelessness Plan process, an Advisory Committee was formed comprising non-profit organizations delivering homelessness services and supportive housing in Surrey. The role of the Advisory Committee was to:

- provide guidance on the engagement approach and facilitate connections with people with living and lived experience of homelessness in Surrey;
- share information, data, and estimates about the number of people experiencing homelessness in Surrey; and
- share input into the development of the draft Homelessness Plan.

The Advisory Committee members included representatives from the following non-profit organizations:

- Atira Women’s Resource Society
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Lookout Housing and Health Society
- Options Community Services
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- RainCity Housing
- Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee
- Surrey Urban Mission Society

The Advisory Committee provided feedback on the draft engagement approach, supported the coordination of interviews with people with lived / living experience, identified frontline service staff, and reviewed the engagement summary report.

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL STAFF MEETINGS

To confirm the City of Surrey’s role as champion to develop and implement the new plan, City staff from across multiple departments (Community Services, Planning and Development, and Engineering) met with the research team to identify the impacts and outcomes of the 2013 *Master Plan for Housing the Homeless* and discuss possible areas and opportunities for City-led actions. Staff representatives will also be asked to review draft recommendations for the Plan.



## WORKSHOPS

Four in-person workshops took place at Surrey City Hall including a project launch in July 2023 and three focused workshops in September 2023. Participants included representatives from social service providers, frontline and outreach workers, and government partners.

Representatives from the following organizations participated in the workshops:

- Aboriginal Housing Management Association
- Affordable Housing Societies
- Atira Women's Resource Society
- BC Housing
- BC Yukon Union of Drug War Survivors
- Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation
- Cloverdale BIA
- Coast Mental Health
- Community Integration Services
- Community Living BC
- Connective Support Society
- Downtown Surrey BIA
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Entre Nous Femme
- Fraser Health Authority
- Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association
- Fraserside Community Services
- Kekinow Native Housing Society
- Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions
- Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction
- Options Community Services
- Pacific Community Resources Society
- Peninsula Homeless to Housing
- RainCity Housing
- Realistic Success Recovery Society
- Sources BC
- Surrey Board of Trade
- Surrey Libraries
- Surrey Newton Union of Drug Users
- Surrey Overdose Response CAT
- Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee
- Surrey Urban Mission Society
- Surrey Road to Home Society
- Surrey Women's Centre
- UNITI
- WRSS Division of Family Practice



- Lookout Housing + Health Society
- Métis Nation British Columbia
- YWCA Metro Vancouver

### **Project Launch Workshop – July 2023 (In-Person)**

The purpose of the project launch event was to inform participants about the Homelessness Prevention and Response Plan. The event was also an opportunity to receive feedback on the project’s guiding principles, consider key outcomes of the Plan, and discuss the most pressing challenges and opportunities to prevent and respond to homelessness in Surrey.

### **Focused Workshops – September 2023 (In-Person)**

Three workshops were held in September 2023; one inviting government partners, one with social service providers, and the third with frontline and outreach workers. The beginning of each session considered pathways into homelessness and provided an opportunity to share what was heard from the project launch and lived / living experience interviews. Each session then focused on pathways out of homelessness and smaller breakout sessions were formed to discuss key themes, including:

- Build More Housing Across the Continuum;
- Facilitate Integrated Health and Housing Programs;
- Create a Services Hub;
- Strengthen Partnerships & Collaboration; and
- Build Capacity.

## **LIVING AND LIVED EXPERIENCE INTERVIEWS**

In August 2023, 29 people with living and lived experience of homelessness in Surrey were interviewed at Rosewood, SUMS Place, Foxglove, and Newton Youth Hub. Interviews were focused to meet people ‘where they are at’ and reach a diverse range of priority groups including youth, women, Indigenous peoples, 2SLGBTQIA+, older adults, people with disabilities, people with complex needs, and people earning low incomes.

Honoraria were provided to participants for their time and expertise. Each conversation was guided by the list of interview questions found in **Appendix A – Lived / Living Experience Interview Questions (page 47)**.



## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

In October 2023, two interviews were conducted with non-profit organizations that were unable to participate in the engagement workshops. These interviews included representatives from Phoenix Society and Engaged Communities Canada Society.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Two virtual focus groups were coordinated in October 2023. One of the focus groups was held with five members of the business community in Surrey. Another focus group was held with 10 participants from immigrant and newcomer serving agencies in Surrey.

Representatives from the following organizations participated in the focus groups:

### Business Community

- Cloverdale Business Improvement Area
- Cloverdale District Chamber of Commerce
- Downtown Surrey Business Improvement Area
- South Surrey & White Rock Chamber of Commerce
- Surrey Board of Trade

### Immigrant Serving Agencies

- Immigrant Serving Societies of BC
- MOSAIC
- Muslim Food Bank
- New Hope Community Services
- Options Community Services
- Sources BC
- SUCCESS
- Surrey Local Immigration Partnership
- Umoja Operation Compassion Society

## CITY WEBSITE

A webpage on the City of Surrey website has been regularly updated to communicate information with the public about the plan process and progress updates.



Figure 2: Engagement Workshop Images, Summer–Fall 2023



## FINDING OUR WAY HOME: RESEARCH ON INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS IN SURREY – WHAT WE HEARD REPORT (2022)

### Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee

Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee's (SUILC) research provides insight into Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Surrey. It highlights their stories; pathways into homelessness in Surrey; existing services and supports; and how the services and supports can be improved to reduce and then eliminate Indigenous homelessness in Surrey.

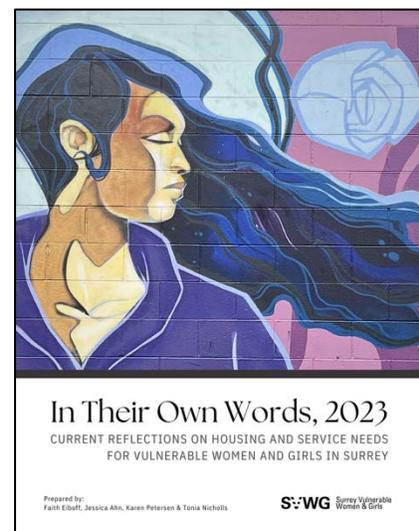
Engagement took place between May and August 2022, where a total of 44 individuals and 12 organizations participated in workshops and interviews. The purpose of SUILC's engagement was to better understand the needs of Indigenous individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Surrey and identify strategic recommendations for better serving these needs in community.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS, 2023: CURRENT REFLECTIONS ON HOUSING AND SERVICE NEEDS FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SURREY

### Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group

Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group's (SVWG) report showcases the findings of a study conducted with 70 women and girls in Surrey about their housing and service needs and challenges. The research provides an update of research conducted by SVWG in 2015 and focusses on the perspectives of women and youth, conveying key findings and recommendations in their own narratives. Twenty key organizations that work on the frontline serving vulnerable women and girls in Surrey also provided their perspectives.





# KEY THEMES



# HOUSING

“When things haven’t worked out for me, it’s because there just isn’t housing available.”

– Lived Experience Interview



## HOUSING

### THE RISING COST OF RENT

Participants shared that rent has become too expensive for many people to afford, especially those relying on benefits or fixed incomes. The cost of rent along with other living costs including hydro, gas, and food is too costly for many to afford. Lived experience interviewees expressed they can no longer afford to live on their own as "*there are no places renting for \$476 these days.*"

People must then find roommates to share the cost, but finding roommates with whom they can feel safe and comfortable is difficult. Older people interviewed have found it challenging to share living spaces with roommates when they have spent their lives living alone or with family members. One focus group participant explained that some people in Surrey are 'hot-sheeting' where they share beds or rent a bed for 12 hours at a time, due to the high cost of housing.



**"It gets hard as you get older. To rent a home you have to live with 3 to 4 others."**

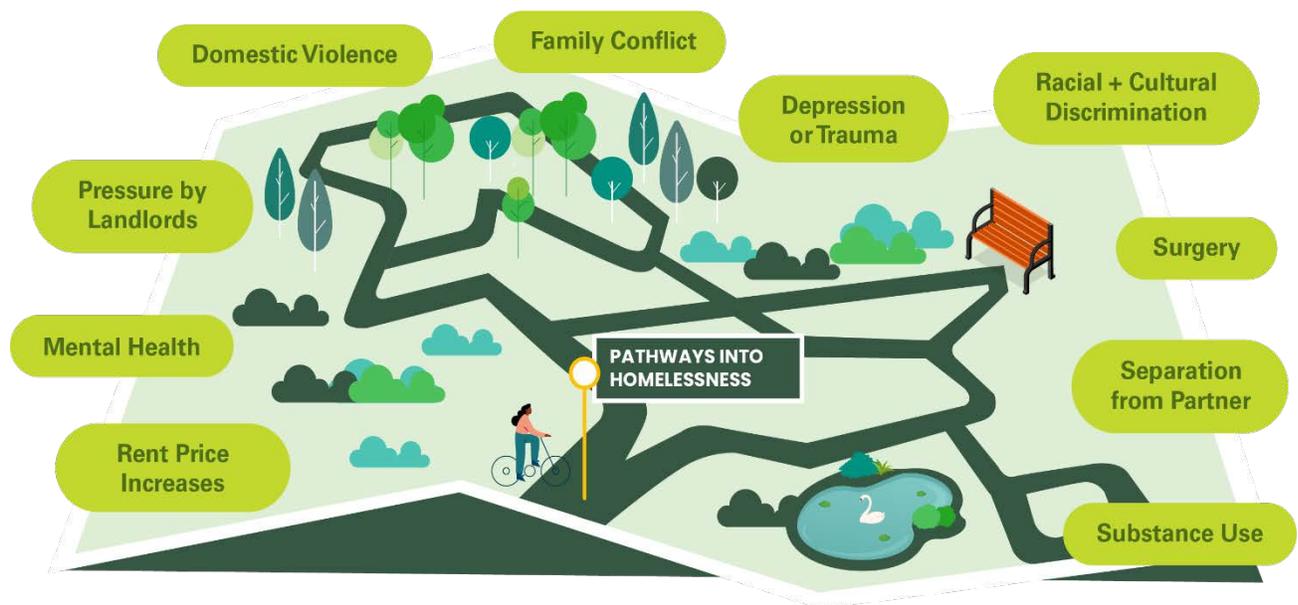
**– Senior person with Lived Experience**



## PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS ARE VARIED, COMPLEX, AND INTERRELATED

Participants with lived experience of homelessness in Surrey shared their stories and the many reasons why they found themselves unhoused. The reasons were often layered and interrelated. Interviewees retold how they experienced homelessness resulting from a range of incidences including family conflict, depression, and trauma.

Figure 3: Pathways into Homelessness shared from Lived Experience Interviews



Women and youth-specific barriers identified in the **Surrey Vulnerable Women and Girls Working Group's** research include affordability and availability for women fleeing violence, housing options that are suitable for children, lacking privacy and independence for youth, substance use, mental health, health, mobility, disability, and other vulnerabilities.

*Source: Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs for Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*

Indigenous people are often experiencing multiple issues at once and have few resources to support them. Key pathways into homelessness for Indigenous people include a history of trauma and violence, high cost of housing, low wages and lack of financial resources, lack of addictions treatment, discrimination, high risk of evictions in a competitive housing market, and the impact of the child welfare system. Participants also highlighted that colonization, the Indian Act, and the reserve system have created conditions of perpetual poverty for Indigenous people.

Key challenges for Indigenous households include racism and discrimination in the housing market, especially for those with larger families; lack of support systems and difficulty navigating a complicated service delivery system; difficulty accessing non-market housing due to long waitlists and eligibility requirements; lack of job skills and steady work opportunities that limit income; among many others.

*from Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee, Finding Our Way Home: Research on Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey (2022)*

**“I was bullied and pressured to move out by my landlord due to rental increases over the past 7 years. I had to move out as it wasn’t a safe spot for me.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**



## EMERGENCY SHELTERS ARE NOT A LONG-TERM HOUSING SOLUTION

People having longer stays at emergency shelters has become more common. Many lived experience interviewees had been **living at a shelter for over a year**, on BC Housing’s waitlist or with no immediate intention to move somewhere more permanent. Frontline workers shared it can often be difficult to encourage people to continue on their journey. A key informant shared that the longer people spend in shelters, the less likely they are to move on to other stages of housing.

**“I’ve been there over a year now. I guess I’m lucky...it seems like people get turned away pretty often.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**

Participants expressed that emergency shelters are only a temporary solution and do not provide conditions for people to be independent and make their own decisions. However, shelters have now been accepted as part of the system as it is better and safer to have people in a shelter than on the streets. Shelters are unable to free-up spaces due to a **lack of viable low-income supportive housing units** for people to transition to. One recommendation was to build more affordable rental housing for those ready to move on from transitional housing, which in turn would free-up shelter beds for those ready to leave shelters and move into longer term housing.

Hospitals are unable to discharge patients ready to move on as they have no fixed address and need housing with some supports. One interviewee with living / lived experience shared how during a recent hospital visit, they had seen 17 people they knew in the hospital.



## A LACK OF HOUSING OPTIONS ACROSS THE NETWORK

Various people with lived / living experience shared they are on waitlists for housing but expect to wait for years before being housed. **Pet-friendly housing** was identified as a gap that can represent a critical barrier to people finding housing as they would rather live on the streets than be separated from their pet. There are also many people staying in non-market or supportive housing that is not well suited for them, but the lack of housing choice has meant residents are 'stuck' where they are.

**“Oftentimes there is no next step, just an ever-increasing mountain of people put on a waitlist. A first stage site turns into a second and third stage site.”**

**– Social Service Provider Key Informant Interview**

Participants described how the housing network is interconnected. An **increase in supply across the entire network** is needed to address the housing shortage, but also changes to the system of referral, coordinated access, transition, and reporting will be needed to achieve efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Non-market housing.** Participants described the lack of non-market supply in Surrey, including affordable, supportive, and subsidized rental housing types for low- and moderate-income groups. The housing system needs more stepping stones in the housing network, from housing with a high-level of supports to post-transitional and independent housing.
- **Emergency Shelters.** More emergency shelter spaces are needed in Surrey, including both low- and high-barrier options. Respondents expressed a need for female and gender-inclusive shelters. Shelter spaces for single men with children was also identified as a gap. With extreme weather conditions becoming more frequent, participants stressed the need for more temporary solutions for respite from the heat and cold. Some participants suggested a shelter is needed outside of the Whalley area and the **lack of an Extreme Weather Response (EWR) solution** for the coming winter in South Surrey and White Rock was raised by many as an area of serious concern.



- **Supportive Housing.** Long-term stable and supportive housing was highlighted by participants as a need. Once in stable housing, many individuals will be able to maintain their housing. Ongoing access to support services such as health and mental health services is key, along with life skills support and coaching such as personal care, food preparation or food skills, cleaning, laundry, completing documents, and long-term planning. Creating a sense of community and addressing the challenges of isolation as part of supportive housing was also noted.
- **Transitional Housing.** Transitional housing was identified by many as being a significant need. People living in emergency situations such as hospitals, shelters, or correctional facilities often have nowhere to move. The available shelter beds in Surrey are typically at capacity, leaving no options for individuals in an emergency.

**“For every 1 unit we have available, there are 10 people put forward. 9 people don’t get housing.”**

**– Social Service Provider Key Informant Interview**

- **Market Rental.** Participants commented on the change that has taken place in Surrey over recent years in which households used to be able to find affordable housing to rent, but it is no longer the case. Finding **housing that is affordable to lower income residents** is increasingly difficult and landlords will often select tenants in stable family or employment situations, excluding those most in need. Market rental available at affordable rents is needed in all Surrey neighbourhoods to free-up space elsewhere in the network. Participants suggested incentivizing developers to help deliver affordable market rental housing through relaxations or fee waivers.

## **PRIORITY POPULATION GROUPS**

Housing is not keeping pace with demand, but there is also a lack of suitable affordable options in the housing network. Housing is needed for families (including large / intergenerational



families), Indigenous People and Elders, seniors, people with disabilities, people with complex needs, newcomers/immigrants, youth aging out of care, and young adults.

- **Housing for Families.** Family-sized units that are independent and low-cost are needed for parents or single parents; shared style housing is not suitable for families. There is a significant gap in housing suitable for larger low-income newcomer families, who may have five or more children. Having more flexible housing options, such as units with room dividers, reduces the risk of a family being separated or displaced. While there is an urgent need for longer-term, stable housing, emergency shelters, short-term solutions are also needed for families who have just relocated or unable to stay in their current housing. Moving from shelter-to-shelter is difficult on families and existing shelters are often low-barrier (i.e. with few requirements for entry and a focus on harm reduction) and not suitable

**Housing for Women and Children** is needed including those fleeing violence, through second stage housing and safe homes. Women and children face unique barriers to accessing housing and services due to stigma, discomfort in the service environment, safety of service location, waitlists and pre-requirements to health services, transportation challenges, lack of childcare, and family not supporting change. The SVWG report recommends developing affordable, safe, secure, and adequate housing options for women and youth and creating more longer-term and low/no barrier housing options.

*from Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs for Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*

for children.

- **Housing for Couples.** Workshop participants referenced the lack of shelter space and supportive housing units for couples. Often couples are separated or required to secretly bring their partners into their housing unit as they are not permitted overnight guests. More couple-friendly housing is needed to help couples stay together.



- **Housing for Seniors.** Seniors were frequently identified as a growing group among people experiencing homelessness. Respondents discussed the increasing number of seniors in shelters and the mental health challenges seniors face due to isolation. Seniors need more long-term and affordable housing options. Housing should be adaptable to allow residents to age-in-place. Accessible housing was also highlighted as an area of need, for older clients as well as people with physical disabilities.
- **Housing for People with Complex Health Needs and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).** Workshop participants reported there are high rates among people experiencing homelessness and those precariously housed who have complex health needs and/or a traumatic or acquired brain injury (ABI). Such populations need client-specific, wrap-around supports and health services. However, the current supportive housing models are often unable to respond to such complex or specific needs. There is also a systemic gap in terms of eligibility and access to mental health services for this population. New models of housing with adequate health supports are needed.
- **Housing for Youth.** Youth-specific or youth-appropriate shelters, supportive housing, and transitional housing are lacking in Surrey. For young adults, traditional shelters can be intimidating. Youth aging out-of-care were identified as a particularly vulnerable group in need of supportive housing with wrap-around supports. Supports should include life skills such as navigating how to pay rent and complete forms, as well as mental health and other support services.

**“Sometimes it’s hard being around people using drugs. They try and separate these groups, but it isn’t easy. At times, I feel tempted to use.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**



- **Housing for Immigrants and Newcomers.** Shelters have flagged an increasing number of refugee, low-income immigrants and other newcomers are coming to their sites with nowhere to go. Often, these individuals have arrived with little to no information about housing and supports and do not speak English. Such immigrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to untrustworthy landlords who may raise rents or give eviction notices illegally, due to a lack of knowledge about the system and their rights. Newcomers without legal status are also ineligible for BC Housing units, limiting their options to shelters or market housing. International students and migrant workers were also identified as being a vulnerable population in need of affordable, safe, and secure housing. A culturally-informed response is needed, ensuring language, religion, diet, and certain other accommodations can be met.

**“A (refugee) claimant family arrived through the border, and they were just released onto the street, spent 3 nights in a local park with a 3-year-old.”**

**– Focus Group with Immigrant Serving Agencies**

## **NON-MARKET HOUSING IN ALL SURREY NEIGHBOURHOODS, NOT ONLY IN CITY CENTRE**

Non-market housing is needed in every community in Surrey and participants shared the importance of **housing and services located across the municipality**. Whalley, Cloverdale, South Surrey and Newton were identified as areas where more shelters, and supportive and transitional housing is needed. Equally, people spoke to the clustering of housing and support services in Whalley, with other communities being underserved. South Surrey was identified as an area which lacks housing and supports, especially for seniors, young adults, and people with complex needs; yet South Surrey was considered an area where NIMBYism is problematic. Guildford was also noted to be an area with many refugees and seniors.



## **ACCESSIBILITY IS VITAL WHEN LOCATING NEW HOUSING AND SERVICES**

Participants expressed that Surrey covers a large geographical area and for those who rely on transit, it can be very **difficult to travel across the City to access appointments and services**. The areas where more housing and services are available, such as Whalley, are not easily accessed from the rest of Surrey. Unhoused people often feel most comfortable and safe in their own community despite the lack of services; they won't travel out of their community for services. Participants recommended **locating new housing close to services and transit**, with opportunities identified along the new SkyTrain route.

## **STIGMA AND NIMBYISM IS PREVALENT**

Workshop participants expressed how much stigma exists around homelessness, which can result in NIMBYism when planning new social housing sites. **Stigma reduction** should be a priority to ensure that social housing residents become integrated members of the community. Respondents advocated the City's role in promoting awareness and education to help break the stigma. Equally, integrating social housing into master-planned or urban expansion sites was suggested to limit neighbour opposition.

An interviewee highlighted that building housing without community consultation and leaving integration to the service provider can increase tensions between the new and existing community. A successful approach involves **early community engagement** by the municipality (including open houses, tours, knocking door-to-door at businesses and homes) and available resources for new residents once they have moved in.

**Grassroots, community-led responses** to new housing, empowering non-profit agencies to work with communities to identify community need was identified by an interviewee as the preferred way to build housing. Community involvement, as opposed to the City identifying land for housing sites, was recommended as a way of avoiding NIMBYism.

The ongoing impacts of **racism and discrimination impact peoples' abilities to access housing and services**. One participant explained how LGBTQIA+ people immigrating to Canada can struggle to find safe and stable housing. Often, they are housed with people from the country they fled from and can face discrimination in their house.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Fraser Health Authority, BC Housing, City of Surrey, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Ministry for Children and Family Development, non-profits, landlords, churches, and libraries were all recognized as critical partners to deliver more housing. Participants expressed that unconventional partnerships should also be considered to produce creative solutions. Participants offered various solutions to deliver more housing including:

- **Interim use of vacant buildings or land for temporary shelters. Collaborating with developers** to use vacant sites before redevelopment was suggested.
- **Collaboration with hotels** as a short-term solution to house people.
- **Businesses** were recognized as facilitators to help deliver housing, such as through **subsidized employer-led housing.**
- **Faith-based communities** are close to the ground and should be given more support for Emergency Winter Response shelters.
- The **co-op housing model** was recommended as a solution to deliver diverse housing that fosters a sense of community and ownership. It was reported the waitlist for existing co-ops is lengthy, demonstrating the demand for this housing type.
- Prioritization of non-profit **housing developments** and recognizing non-profits as community builders. Participants called for more funding to help non-profits purchase housing.
- **City-led actions** to help facilitate more housing include releasing public land for housing; DCC fee waivers; streamlining and fast-tracking approvals for non-profits; reducing zoning barriers to allow for higher density and diversity of housing types; and policy updates to incentivize affordable housing in private market developments.



- **Partnerships between municipalities** were supported by participants, recognizing the fluidity and cross-boundary movements of people experiencing homelessness; this is not

Opportunities for addressing Indigenous homelessness in Surrey include creating more opportunities for Indigenous-controlled housing, creating renter processes that meet the needs of Indigenous households, more dedicated Indigenous support services, and more lower cost housing.

*from Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee, Finding Our Way Home: Research on Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey (2022).*

only Surrey's problem.

- **Partnerships with First Nations** and the need to rebuild relationships and unlearn old practices was advocated by participants. This could unlock other opportunities such as an Indigenous-led stream of housing with Housing Accelerator Fund dollars.
- **Partnerships between all levels of government** were identified to deliver housing quickly through BC Housing's Community Housing Fund, Indigenous Housing Fund, and Community Development Fund, CMHC's Rapid Housing Initiative, Housing Accelerator Fund, CMHC investments, and other funding streams. Governments should be investing in relationships to create trust and celebrate success. Participants advised creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between all senior-level leaders in the region as a guide for service coordination and alignment of values to use as leverage to meet community needs.



- Better collaboration with the organizations that provide personal identification is needed. Without official identification, people cannot access income and housing support.

**“I need help with my ID and welfare. I need to line up all the time to get help with my ID.”**

– **Lived Experience Interview**

Participants highlighted several ideas to help women and youth find suitable housing including, direct housing support and outreach, more subsidies and subsidized housing options, and support and advocacy to communicate with landlords.

*from Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs for Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*





# INTEGRATED HOUSING AND HEALTH PROGRAMS

“Stable housing for an individual, coupled with mental health counselling, health inventions, food, and closing, that is where you really start to see success.”

– Social Service Provider Interview

QUIBBLE

HEALTH  
PHOENIX T  
HOUSING CENTRE  
18670 - 94A AVE

## INTEGRATING HOUSING AND HEALTH PROGRAMS

### BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HEALTH SERVICES

Lived experience interviewees shared how they struggle to access health services for various reasons, including mobility issues for those with physical disabilities. **Transportation** can be a challenge, such as arranging a HandyDART or using public transit to travel to appointments. People with mental health and substance use issues find attending health services and appointments challenging, due to psychological barriers such as anxiety or lack of retention regarding appointment times. Respondents expressed that individuals need **immediate access, drop-in health services**, not scheduled appointments.

**“I want to be offered help. I want iHART to come but they aren’t available when I need.”**

– **Lived Experience Interview**

Other barriers to accessing health services include a negativity towards clinical healthcare or hospital environments due to **past traumatic experiences**, a fear that individuals will end up in the emergency department as their health needs are not adequately treated, and **long wait times to receive medical attention**. Respondents also highlighted circumstances where people are coming to a shelter from hospital because they lost their housing while receiving treatment in hospital. Some people in shelters are **fearful of losing their shelter space** if they seek medical attention. Workshop participants shared that some people experiencing homelessness are afraid to go into housing because their health needs may not be met.



Lived experience interviewees shared that they are more likely to access in-house **health services or mobile services that come to where they are at**. Participants shared that many people arriving at shelters have varied health needs, including primary care, counselling, and mental health supports and that shelters need more medical services, especially wound care.

**“I use the medical mobile program... it’s great. And free! They come once a week and help me with what I need. Maybe they could expand their services.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**

Participants recommended there should be more integrated health and housing models, including short-term transitional as well as long-term low-barrier housing where housing and healthcare expertise is combined. Government partners explained that in-house services are better suited to the complex care context. However, in-reach services, such as regular visits from a community worker, may be more appropriate for supportive housing.

## **A RANGE OF HEALTH SERVICES ARE NEEDED IN-HOUSE**

Social service providers highlighted that more people are being sent to hospital from shelters and supportive housing because they do not have access to appropriate health services. They commented that in **an integrated health and housing model, where in-house health services are available to residents, fewer people may be admitted to hospital, reducing the strain on emergency services**. This new model of assisted living is needed specifically for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness with substance use challenges (including tobacco use) who are not eligible for assisted living, but whose health needs are not being met in the new complex care/enhanced health model.

Participants highlighted the range of health services needed in shelters and supportive housing including medication support, mental health services such as counselling and trauma counselling, general health check-ups, confidential youth-specific clinics, sexual health, substance use support, psychiatrist, dental, physiotherapy, pre- and post-natal supports, and



physical health and nutrition programs. These health services should be supported by a team of case managers or peers to help people navigate the different supports available.

## **ADOPTING A CLIENT-CENTRED, TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH**

Respondents shared that integrated health and housing models should advocate for a **client-centred, trauma-informed approach** and that some housing options should also be low-barrier so that no one is turned away. Participants found integrated health and housing programs have been successful in Surrey at Rosewood, which offers medical and dental care, Maxxine Wright that provides doctors, midwives, and counselling, and Foxglove that offers complex care services for mental health and substance use. Options' Home-Based Addictions Support and Detox program was also commended, where an addictions team visits clients daily in their homes. Participants recognized the important role this program plays in prevention. The Broadway Youth Resource Centre in Vancouver was highlighted by respondents as an example of providing services for youth up to age 24 including schooling options, food, medical support (including counselling and substance use support), with outreach on the lower floor and housing

**“Housing like Foxglove has really done me well. But I wish they had detox right here. They should have options for people to go to AA meetings at night – or just space for people to tell their stories.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**

above.

## **COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE HEALTH AND HOUSING SECTORS**

A social service provider identified how the defined roles and responsibilities of health staff and housing providers have created unintentional silos and a two-tier system between health and housing. This also applies to other key sectors such as income assistance, child and youth services, and others. These transition points between providers create challenges for the client. An example, regularly mentioned by participants, is when clients are discharged from hospital care but do not have access to health support when back in the community. Respondents



recommended **greater integration around staffing models** to better respond to clients' needs and circumstances.

Frontline workers called for process changes as currently organizations need permission to access client health information, which results in longer wait times to access treatment. A **centralized database, built around confidentiality** would reduce the need to seek consent to release information (at each touch point) and would reduce application times so clients can access the medical treatment needed in a timely manner.

For housing with embedded health supports to work effectively, respondents explained that an **ongoing funding commitment** is required, such as through the Reaching Home program. Others shared that where integrated health and housing projects are City-led, the City should be a partner. Fraser Health Authority was also identified as a key partner. Collaboration is also needed with housing and health providers, such as through optometrists for glasses and eye exams. Creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between all partners reportedly works well.

Participants also advocated **greater integration between Fraser Health Authority and Vancouver Coastal Health**. People experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are moving between the different health regions and unable to access health services in both.

**“Surrey is so big. It’s not a one size fits all everywhere. The only way we can find a solution is if we all work together.”**

**– Business Community Focus group**





# SUPPORT SERVICES

“PCRS help you get set up, show you how to adult and do things on your own. How to take better care of yourself and support you at home so you are not on our own.”

– Key Informant Interview

## SUPPORT SERVICES

### THERE ARE GAPS IN KEY SUPPORT SERVICES IN SURREY

Participants noted many gaps in service delivery in Surrey including a lack of social infrastructure, counselling and mental health support, tenant support including rent and eviction support, transit passes, life skills, food security, employment programs.

A key informant commented how the needs of racialized communities in Surrey have gone unaddressed and unabated, with diverse neighbourhoods, such as Newton, offering very few culturally appropriate housing and support services.

**“It is disheartening when people understand the demographics of Surrey. Newton is the most diverse neighbourhood, but there are very few services. There’s a heavy concentration of Somali, Afghani, South Asian, Chinese, Urban Indigenous... a wide variety of people with different languages and backgrounds, whose needs are not being met.”**

– Key Informant Interview

**Numerous service gaps and barriers were identified for Indigenous people in Surrey.** Participants gave consistent feedback that their experience with services reflected a lack of resources and a lack of supports that address the needs of Indigenous people. Examples of gaps and barriers included lack of individual advocacy, requiring families to attend programs, service navigation, being asked invasive questions, lack of services for Indigenous mothers, lack of trauma-informed staff, and overcrowded schools.

*from Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee,  
Finding Our Way Home: Research on Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey (2022).*



**Culturally sensitive supports** that acknowledge the needs of diverse populations are needed. Focus group participants suggested having resources available in every language the people living in Surrey speak. An Indigenous lived experience interviewee shared how Elder visits at their shelter once or twice a week helped them attend a sweat lodge which was cleansing and helped restore their spirit.

Gaps in services for women and youth include 24-hour low-barrier drop-ins and extended after-hours services, mental health and trauma support, including grief counselling and supports for childhood and sexual trauma, couple/relationship support services, and services to support youth through the transition to adult services and independence.

*from Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs for Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*

**Support and training for staff and frontline workers** is also lacking. Participants described a high burn-out rate and frontline staff turnover due to a lack of counselling, therapy, and other support services. A lot of pressure is also placed on housing case managers to find housing for clients. Continuous training, including trauma-informed care, Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), and equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB) is needed.

**“ ...come into field because we care about people, but it’s hard to care for people if you can’t care for yourself.”**

**– Frontline Workshop Participant**



## SERVICES HUBS TO OFFER A RANGE OF SERVICES

Respondents imagined a hub as a place people may go to access one particular service but also be connected to other services, i.e., come for a meal and then connect with health services.

A focus group participant shared how people experiencing homelessness have nowhere to go, except the library, during the day after they must leave the shelter. A hub should act as a community drop-in space, providing 24-hour wrap-around, culturally appropriate services through collaboration with multiple agencies.

**Youth need better access to information about services and would benefit from better connections to supports through the creation of a one-stop hub with various services and professionals.**

*from Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs for Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*

However, one interviewee commented that a services hub should not act as a replacement to outreach services. Those most vulnerable may not access the hub. Most felt a hub should include:

- **Housing services.** Participants identified the need for housing services including applications for BC Housing registry, newcomer support, and housing support workers on site available to provide assistance.
- **Health services** including counselling services (including trauma and mental health counselling), primary care services, Fraser Health's Integrated Homelessness Action Response Teams (IHART), Fraser Health staff, general health services including optometrist, dental, nurses, family doctors, and overdose prevention / harm reduction supports.
- Other **general support services** were referenced including employment and training, life skills, hygiene (including showers and laundry), meals, childcare, legal support, transit passes, crisis support (clothes or donation centre), EWR or emergency day shelter, and refugee/landed immigrant assistance. Federal Government services were mentioned by most participants, such as tax, welfare, involuntary separation, pension, and identification



(ID) support. ID support was particularly stressed as being a barrier as people without ID are unable to access health services. It was suggested that hubs consider storage for

Potential ideas for Indigenous service solutions include First Nations land trust in Surrey, training and employment opportunities, Indigenous renters' directory where landlords can list properties, website where Indigenous people can access supports and find advocates in Surrey, 24/7 services dedicated to housing Indigenous people, treatment centres for families, program where Elders do not have to pay for food, and access to garden for growing food.

*from Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee,  
Finding Our Way Home: Research on Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey (2022).*

belongings while services are being accessed.

## SERVICE HUBS IN EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD

Participants expressed that every neighbourhood in Surrey needs a hub and the services offered should be community specific. The neighbourhoods most referenced to locate a hub include Newton, Cloverdale, Whalley, and South Surrey. Fleetwood and Guildford were also mentioned by participants. The location of hubs should also consider accessibility by public transit, access to the hospital, and proximity to shelters and supportive housing.

Respondents suggested using **existing civic spaces as micro-hubs**, including community centres and libraries. The concept of **integrating housing and support services in one building** by building a hub on the ground floor with supportive housing above was also referenced by various attendees.

## SERVICE HUBS INVOLVE MULTIPLE ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNERS

Participants highlighted that collaboration between several sectors was key to implementing service hubs in Surrey including local businesses, City of Surrey, non-profits, faith-based organizations, and government partners. They highlighted the significance of hubs being



operated by multiple agencies that offer different services. This collaboration could create **information and data sharing opportunities** and improve communication across organizations. However, respondents did express the difficulties around people consenting to share their information.

Government partner workshop participants shared feedback around need for **consistent long-term operational funding** for a service hub. There is currently no model to fund hubs. Hubs in other jurisdictions have been funded through their municipalities and recent Union of BC Municipalities' grants, Reaching Home program, Ministry of Justice, or by different agencies each year (which was not advised due to administrative burden). Challenges can arise when non-profits are restricted with a narrow focus due to funding which can then silo services. Funders need to create flexibility for partners to work together and collaborate.

Respondents highlighted that Pacific Community Resource Society operates successful service hubs for youth, which provide all services on-site except housing. Non-profits have been critically involved in the design and delivery of these hubs. Equally, several organizations provide supports for Indigenous people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, such as FRAFCA, Kekinow, Options, School District 36 Indigenous support workers, Together We Can, and Atira, among others.

Participants saw the **City's role as an administrator or convener of the hub**. The City would also be critical in identifying land for service hubs. Several participants highlighted the role of government partners to facilitate service hubs, including Fraser Health Authority, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and BC Housing. Government partner roles should include co-funding social work and case management positions within the hub and support with navigation.

There was also consideration that centralized hubs may not be suitable for all groups in crisis, and that youth, women, or families may be unwilling to go to drop-in locations that are low-

**“When the right people are connected together, good things happen.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**



barrier or those frequented primarily by men. Consideration of the users and type of services to be provided will be critical. One proposed solution was to explore dedicated mobile outreach teams for selected services.





# PREVENTION

“I never thought about coming here before, never even applied. To know there’s an option for single women is comforting. Not having the knowledge of this place existing was preventing me, and I’m sure prevents others.”

– Lived Experience Interview

## PREVENTION

### PEOPLE ARE MOST VULNERABLE DURING LIFE TRANSITIONS

Participants shared that people are most likely to slip through the safety net without the support they need during times of transition, including when **youth age out of care** and transition to adulthood, **hospital patients without a fixed address are discharged** into the community, **immigrants or newcomers** start their new lives in Canada, and **older adults enter the senior stage of life**.

- Youth aging out-of-care need **wrap around services** and help navigating how to pay rent, complete forms, life skills, mental health counselling and on-site services with adequate staffing levels. **Partnerships with schools** to provide in-school services and raise awareness of programs or organizations could help support youth better during transitions.

Youth suggested planning for their future at an earlier age, i.e. while they are still in group homes, would help ease the transition into adulthood and the adult service system to ensure continuity of support.

*from Surrey Vulnerable Women & Girls Working Group, In Their Own Words, 2023: Current Reflections on Housing and Service Needs For Vulnerable Women and Girls in Surrey.*

- For refugees, low-income immigrants and other newcomers entering a new country with limited to no knowledge of the housing system and services, **information should be provided pre-landing**. Before arriving, they should be encouraged to research housing availability and cost, organizations and settlement agencies that can support newcomers, and the requirements for employment or housing such as resumes, references, and financial information.



- As older adults who are considered low-income and at-risk of homelessness age, they become more vulnerable and need more support to stay safely and stably housed. Participants shared that when someone turns 65, they stop receiving income assistance and become eligible for pension. However, during this transition, cheques are not automatically transferred from income assistance to the pension, and seniors who are at-risk of homelessness can lose their housing due to insufficient funds if they have not applied for their pension.

**“When staff are good, it makes such a difference. People can help explain the paperwork and all the documents.”**

– **Lived Experience Interview**

Greater involvement, support, and communication is needed between different organizations, youth and adult services, and departments to ensure a smooth transition.

**Closer alliance with landlords** is an important prevention piece, to ensure once a person is housed positive interventions are made to prevent evictions and future incidents of homelessness. Cultural awareness or sensitivity training for landlords supported by the City was also suggested by a focus group participant.

## **CLIENT ACCESS TO HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES**

Participants indicated that navigating the system is a barrier to finding housing and accessing services; many people experiencing homelessness did not know where to access the services. It is very easy for people to get overwhelmed and give up. With better access to information and services upfront, instances of homelessness may be prevented.

Frontline workers highlighted how when someone moves between shelters and come from outside organizations, it is hard to pass information on in terms of resources and specific client needs. **Information sharing between different organizations was recommended** by participants to pool resources and avoid duplication. This could be actioned through coordinated access or information sharing agreements.



Many called for a straightforward system where information is centralized and resources can be accessed faster. Some suggested creating a hub to act as a physical database of information that raises awareness of services and helps groups network and share resources.

**“There should be some straightforward system, with everything upfront. For me it is added stress, having to look at multiple websites, there is information everywhere.”**

**– Lived Experience Interview**

A **digital services hub** was proposed by participants as a centralized online website and/or mobile application to find information. The digital hub should contain information on all the different organizations providing housing and support services and an accurate and up-to-date list of services. Giving contact details for the specific team to contact at an organization is also important, such as a direct phone number or e-mail address. Social media was also highlighted by participants as a useful resource, such as Facebook groups

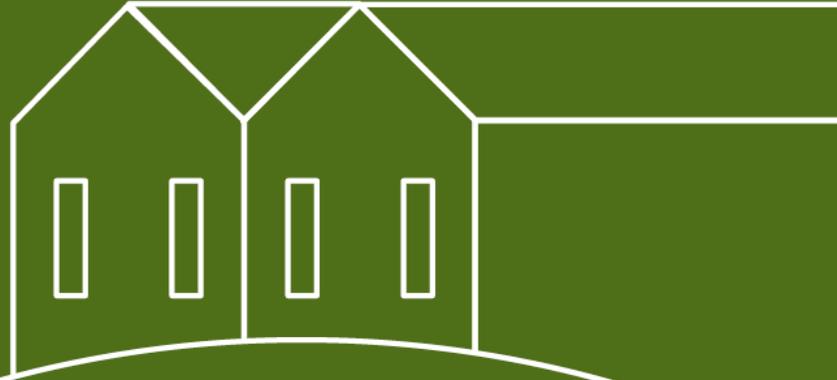




**“Housing is everyone’s responsibility.  
It is critical to move clients from  
an unstable state to a stable state  
when they are starting their new life.”**

– Immigrant Serving Agency Focus Group





# APPENDIX A

## LIVED EXPERIENCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## LIVED EXPERIENCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

We have prepared guiding questions we can reference as part of the conversation. We recognize that not all questions might be appropriate and/or some may be answered as the conversation unfolds.

- Tell me about yourself and your story.
- Do you currently have affordable, safe housing that meets your household's needs?
- What kind of housing do you need?
- How old were you when you first experienced homelessness? What were the main reasons you first experienced homelessness?
- When did you most recently experience homelessness? Why was that?
- Have you always lived in Surrey? If not, when did you start living in Surrey? Why did you move to Surrey?
- What area(s) of Surrey do you generally stay or spend time in (e.g. Whalley, Newton, Guildford, Cloverdale, or South Surrey). Why this/these areas?
- What support services do you access in Surrey? (prompts: housing, mental health support, substance use services, free meals or food bank, employment services, trauma counselling...)
- Are there some services you visit more often or like more than others?
- Do you ever use support services outside of Surrey (such as in New West or Vancouver?)
- Are there areas of Surrey that need more support services? If yes, which areas? What services?
- Could you share a time when you succeeded in getting the services or housing you needed? What helped you succeed? (prompts: was there a particular housing program or support service/individual who helped?)
- Tell me about a time when and where you didn't get the support you needed to access housing. What was the reason? (prompts: Was it a person, a process, lack of funding, waitlists, services that didn't connect to each other? Something else?)
- Is there anything preventing you from accessing emergency shelters or other services?
- What does the word 'home' mean to you?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?



