



**Housing Needs
Review 2023**
Housing Services

Kawartha Lakes
Jump In 

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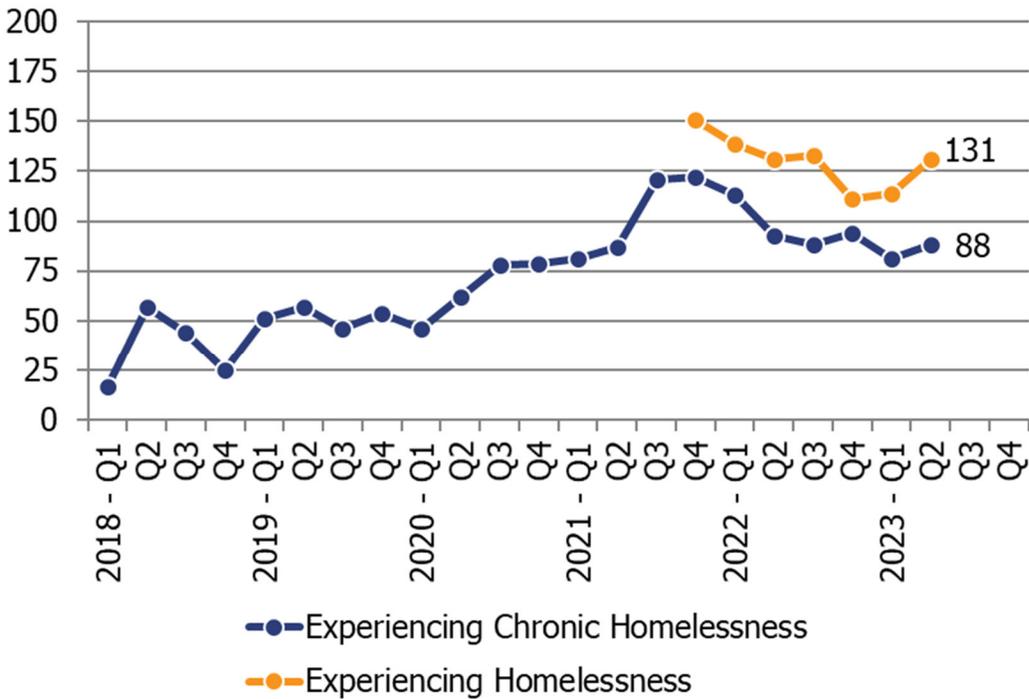
Introduction

The City of Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton (CKL-H) is experiencing a housing and houselessness crisis. Of the approximately 160 unhoused right now across Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton County we estimate that about 45 to 50 are at least periodically experiencing unsheltered houselessness (staying outside or in vehicles) as of August 2023. This number will fluctuate as people's circumstances can change on a daily basis.

Coordinated access system

There is estimated to be at least 30 more people actively experiencing houselessness who are not officially connected to the coordinated access system. CKL-H has an established and supported system of access for the unhoused, which provides a consistent way to identify, prioritize and connect households to housing and supports. CKL-H coordinated system currently includes a common assessment and centralized list (By Name List). The goal of a coordinated access system is to ensure the unhoused are provided housing-focused supports so that houselessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. However, the system may not capture all unhoused households. There may be a number of reasons why people are not on the By-Name-List including lapsed consent forms, lack of engagement with agencies and financial reasons such as losing a portion of income. For more information about the coordinated access system please visit: <https://www.kawarthalakes.ca/en/living-here/housing.aspx>

Category	Service Area	Kawartha Lakes	Haliburton County
Entire Total	138	113	25
Couple	3	2	1
Family	26	17	9
Senior	16	15	1
Single	84	71	13
Youth	9	8	1



Waiting lists

As of June 30th, 2023 there are currently 2,383 households waiting for Community Housing. The wait list for some exceeds 10 or more years. 1,360 singles, seniors and family households have been on the wait list under 3 years, thus 57% of the total households waiting for housing will not be offered rent geared to income housing until at least 2030. Many households experiencing houselessness in our community have limited income and are waiting on the list for access to rent-geared-to income housing. As of 2022, the vacancy rate for Kawartha Lakes and area is estimated at 1.5% (CMHC, 2023).

2383 households in need are waiting

7 years is the average wait time



Average rent prices

The cost of rentals has increased across all unit types in CKL-H. According to the local rental listings, affordable units for those individuals with low and fixed incomes are no longer an reality. For family households, the average monthly cost to rent a 3-bedroom unit is now \$2,391, an increase of 65% in just 5 years. The average monthly cost to

rent a 2-bedroom today is \$1,870 – 57% more than in 2018 and one-bedroom and room rental prices have also risen by 31% and 54% respectively.

Quarter	Room	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom
2018 - Q2	\$550	\$942	\$1,188	\$1,447
2023 - Q2	\$721	\$1,451	\$1,870	\$2,391
% Change from 2018 to 2023	31%	54%	57%	65%

Monthly rent for a 3-bedroom unit has risen **65%** since 2018

It is within this evolving and dynamic climate that the Housing Services team at the City of Kawartha Lakes conducted a brief Needs Review. The goal of this project was to better understand the current service gaps and housing needs across our community from the perspective of service users and service providers, to assist with appropriate investment planning of new Provincial Homelessness Prevention Program funding. Our team hopes to shed light on the current experience of those who are unhoused by providing a non-judgemental, trauma-informed and safe space to share their personal thoughts and ideas.

Housing Services may also use the results of this review to:

- Be aware of, listen to and support those unhoused
- Inform organizing or supporting peer-led committees or groups
- Enhance access to services and eliminate barriers
- Allocate resources and enhance programs and service delivery
- Support capacity building by informing future training and education

Listening to the experts

Humility and generosity of spirit

Housing Services wants to acknowledge the generosity by which those with experiences of houselessness participated and openly shared their personal stories to assist us in creating and shaping this report. All service users participated enthusiastically in the spirit of sharing and community improvement. It was clear that the health and well-being of CKL-H is important to each of them. Several respondents noted that being asked to participate and share their personal views on the topic of housing and houselessness showed that the community is interested in change and saw this as a good starting point. Bethany, who is currently couch surfing shares this sentiment:

“Appreciate the recognition that there are issues and by putting this (survey) in place, means its important and it gives hope that there is more to be done.

Service user interviews

Housing Services is committed to providing a forum for persons with lived experiences of houselessness to share feedback on what is working and not working, as well as share ideas for positive change. Confidential interviews with service users were conducted in person and were kept open-ended and semi-structured, allowing people to share whatever they felt most important. It was clear that many service users felt a strong desire to share their experiences and ideas and have often been left out of the conversation.

“Appreciate the recognition that there are issues and by putting this (survey) in place, means its important and it gives hope that there is more to be done.” Bethany, currently couch surfing with friends

The population interviewed or service users, are those currently experiencing houselessness, chronic or episodic as well as individuals who have in the recent past experiences of being unhoused but may have housing now. The respondents included those couch-surfing with friends and families, living rough outside in parks or abandoned buildings, shelter stayers and those housed but vulnerable to losing housing. All individuals were affected greatly by poverty, receiving government assistance (OW, ODSP) or pensions or very limited or no income.

A total of 45 service users were interviewed from City of Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton. One survey was completed as a couple and this is reflected in the data analysis. 100% of respondents provided consent for de-identified information to be shared in this report. Direct quotations from respondents are exact, taken from the surveys directly. To protect participant’s identities every person was given an alias.

Service provider survey

Service providers are those who provide services and support across our community from all sectors and levels. The service provider survey was collected online and was open for the first three weeks of August, 2023. A total of 95 surveys were returned. Included were community agencies, health centres, police and paramedic services, Ontario Works client services, schools, employment agencies, local committees/groups and food banks.

The City of Kawartha Lakes would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of all service providers working tirelessly to support and empower the community often in challenging and complex situations. The response to this survey and the incredible depth of ideas and sharing is truly inspiring. See Appendix A for both complete surveys.

This report provides a synopsis of what we heard from our community.

What we heard

Demographics

Housing services gathered the following demographics from the service user respondents, some of which has not been captured since the last [Homelessness Enumeration in 2021](#) which was notably affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We consider the following data an essential aspect of understanding service gaps and barriers for those who are unhoused and we acknowledge that the pain, injustice and oppression many of the service users have endured made sharing a challenge and yet, they did come forward, willing to share their personal narrative and information.

Connection and commitment

Overwhelmingly, people care about this community, belong here and are connected to this area and want to live here. Service users are forthcoming about their experiences because it is important to them to improve conditions for themselves, family, friends and the wider community. Heidi, a pregnant woman who is couch surfing with friends shared that “I want to get people’s attention about homelessness” and suggested having a rally or march to raise awareness about the unhoused in our community.

“I want to get people’s attention about homelessness” Heidi, couch surfing with friends

The majority of respondents (80%) shared that CKL is their primary home community. Housing services was able to intentionally engage with 6 individuals from Haliburton County through Outreach efforts (13%) and there was a small percentage of service users whose primary community is not this area (7%).

The respondents

Of the 45 service users we spoke with, 29 identified as male (65%), 15 female (33%) and one couple completed the survey together.

Almost 50% of the respondents were aged between 30-39, followed by 27% aged 40-49 and 13% aged 50-59.

Age (years)	Count	%
0-17	0	0%
18-29	4	9%
30-39	22	49%
40-49	12	27%
50-59	6	13%
60+	1	2%

Indigenous and racial identity

The term Indigenous refers to three unique cultural groups: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Peoples. The term Indigenous Peoples is commonly used to refer to their cultures globally and acknowledges both commonalities and vast diversity of culture, history, teachings, languages and worldviews that comprise this population (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021). Indigenous peoples currently make up 5% of Canada’s population (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021).

Research has shown that Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately affected by houselessness as a result of a long history of colonization (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021). Most recent census for CKL-H indicates that 2.9% of people identify as Indigenous in Kawartha Lakes and 3.5% in Haliburton.

The number of individuals who identify with the term Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis remains high within the service user population. Of the 45 respondents, 10 identified as Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit or Métis or 23%.

23% of service users identified with the term Indigenous

It is important to note that definitions of homelessness as well as the systems created to address it are based on a Western, colonial perspective. Thus, Indigenous ‘homelessness’ is being re-defined and referred to as ‘houselessness’. This takes into account the broader cultural perspective which includes severed connection to home, family, culture, identity and community (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2021)).

Gender identity

We asked people this:

LGTBQIA2S+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit + anything else you may identify yourself. Do you identify with any of these or any not listed?

11% of service users identified with the term LGTBQIA2S+

Those identifying with a minority sexual or gender identity experience high rates of trauma and stressors and are disproportionately represented (DiGuseppi et al., 2022). Latest census shows that approximately 4% of all Canadians are sexual minorities however, 11% of service users who have present or past experiences with houselessness identify this way and just as many (11%) did not feel comfortable answering this question (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Often cited as a primary reason for houselessness, stigma and conflict/rejection from family and peers is a precipitating factor (DiGuseppi, 2022). Much research has shown considerably higher risks for substance use, health-related infections and poorer mental health relative to cis-hetero or non-identifying individuals (DiGuseppi, 2022). Culturally competent services for those unhoused in CKL-H is a must.

Household

Single adults make up 78% of the service users we spoke to. Couples accounted for 13% and seniors for 6% and youth (aged 16-24) for 2%.

78% are single adults

Military Service

No service responders agreed that they have served in the Canadian military or RCMP and one respondent shared they had served in the military outside of Canada. There are an estimated 629, 300 veterans living in Canada, however the numbers vary greatly by region or area (Amon & McRae, 2021). Further research may be required to uncover more about Veteran houselessness in CKL-H.

Keeping Pets and owners together

20% of respondents indicated they have pets. Of those who responded "no" to having pets, many shared during the interview, that they previously did have pets but due to

their current housing situation, had to abandon pets (fleeing for safety) or had to leave the pet with a friend or family member. Research has shown that some aspects of psychological well-being is improved for those who have pets, including self-efficacy, and positive emotions (Grajfoner et al., 2021). Especially during challenging times such as isolation or illness, animal companionship and animal assisted activities could be explored in the context of improving mental health and wellbeing (Grajfoner et al., 2021)

Of the surveys completed for individuals living in Haliburton, 80% had at least one pet with them while living unhoused. Increased pet-friendly shelter beds and housing that is pet friendly with an outdoor space/yard for the pets was a key theme overall but especially in Haliburton. Individuals staying in vehicles noted that it is unsafe, hot and unhealthy for them and especially their pet to sleep in the vehicle. Melanie writes, "Both mentally and physically, living in the car is unbearable. One dog, the big dog, must not stay in the car, it's too hard on him". She continues to share, "I just want a place I can lock my doors and feel safe. I hardly ever sleep anymore."

80% of homeless people have at least 1 pet

Another individual from Haliburton, Roger, stays in his vehicle with his dog, and shared that he worries about his dog's health in the hot vehicle, but has no access to medical care for his beloved American bulldog. Roger writes, "No vet. Not enough money if I needed anything for my dog's health. Not able to access the shelter (with a pet). Sleeping in a car is very hot for my dog."

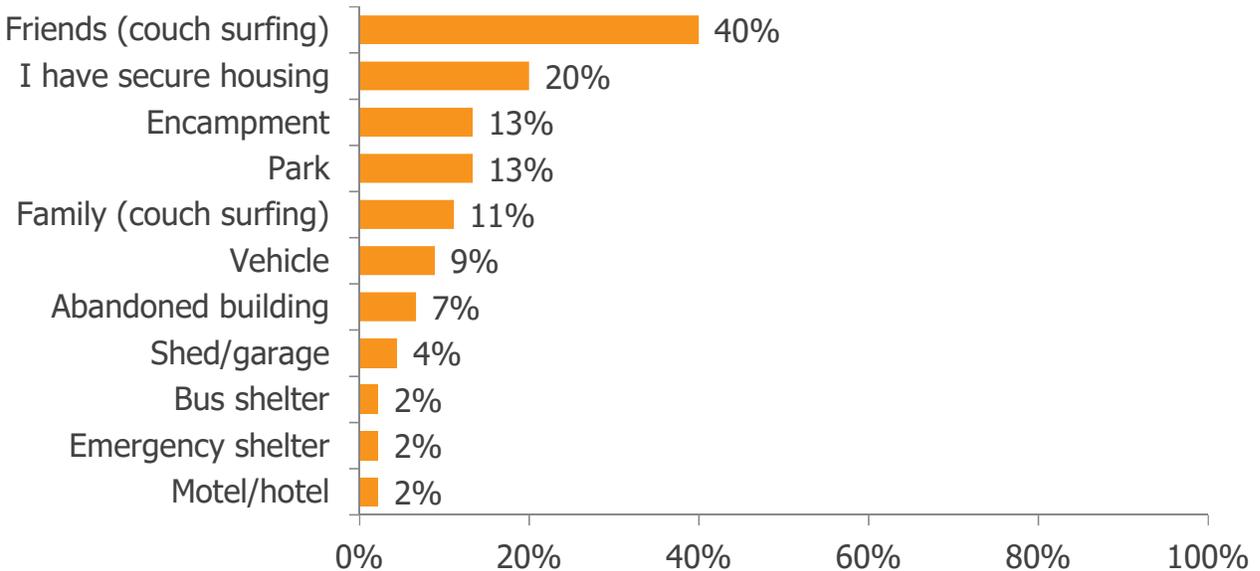
"Both mentally & physically, living in the car is unbearable. One dog, the big dog, must not stay in the car, it's too hard on him." Melanie, currently living in a vehicle

Where did you sleep last night?

Service users that are experiencing houselessness are finding ways to survive by couch surfing with friends (40%) and family (11%). 28% of respondents were sleeping completely outdoors (parks, temporary sites, bus shelter). 11% reported they found shelter in abandoned buildings, sheds/garage. 9% of the unhoused are sleeping in a vehicle.

51% are couch surfing with friends or family

Where did you sleep last night?



Restrictions and Evictions

What is the reason for your housing loss?

76% of respondents shared that evictions and restrictions led to their current housing situation. This includes being evicted by landlord or eviction by family as well as restricted and discharged from the shelter.

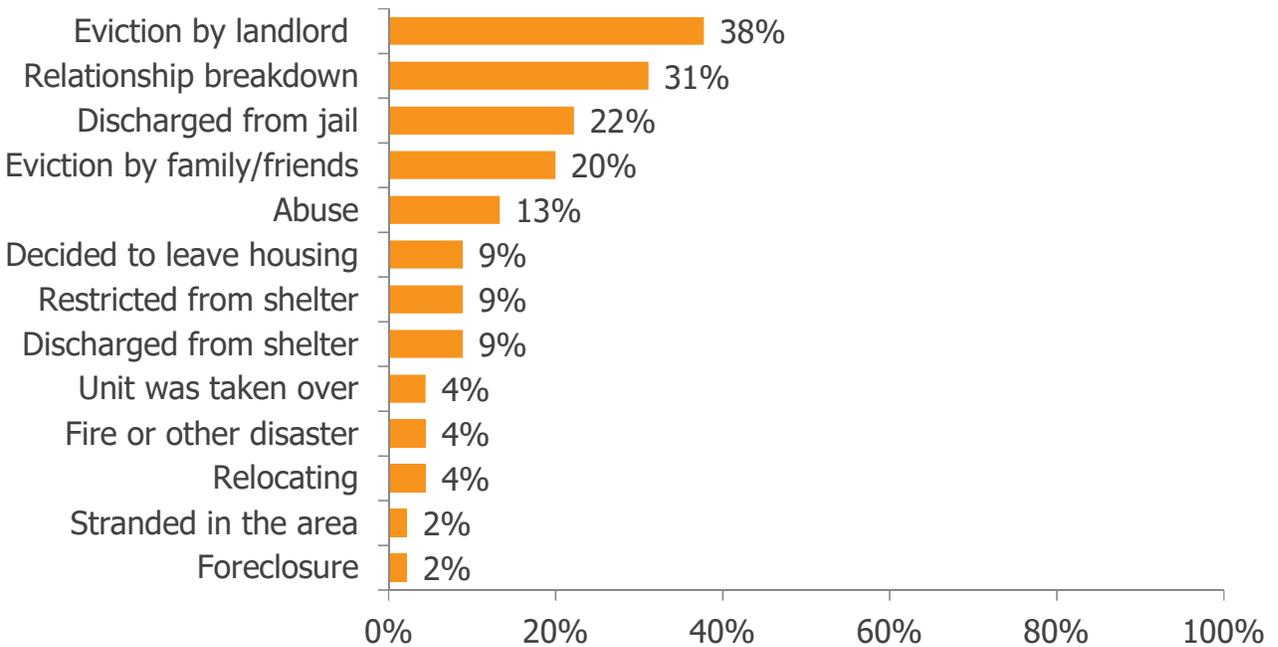
The largest theme across all surveys is household eviction, trespassed from certain housing buildings, and restricted from emergency shelter.

76% have been evicted or restricted

Household Eviction

This theme appeared the most across all surveys and appears in two contexts. First, evicted or "kicked" out of the family household. Second, relationship issues caused a restriction or eviction such as a break-up or separation. In several cases, the death of a loved one triggered eviction and loss of housing.

Reason for current housing situation?



Trespassed from housing buildings

Those unhoused in the community have often been restricted specifically from visiting or staying at certain buildings such as 68 Lindsay Street North or 111 William Street North. Often the individuals are trespassed officially and other times, informally.

At the time of this survey, many individuals who were couch surfing with friends and/or family at 68 Lindsay Street North, were being actively restricted from entering the building due to new security measures being implemented. Some respondents were being directly affected by these policies and would not be able to couch surf any longer. There was much expressed frustration and fear around not having anywhere to go.

Andrea, couch surfing with family is fearful of being kicked out. She shares the toll feeling unwelcome has on a person is severe. "Constantly being told to get out from other buildings is demeaning – no matter where I go, I am told to leave."

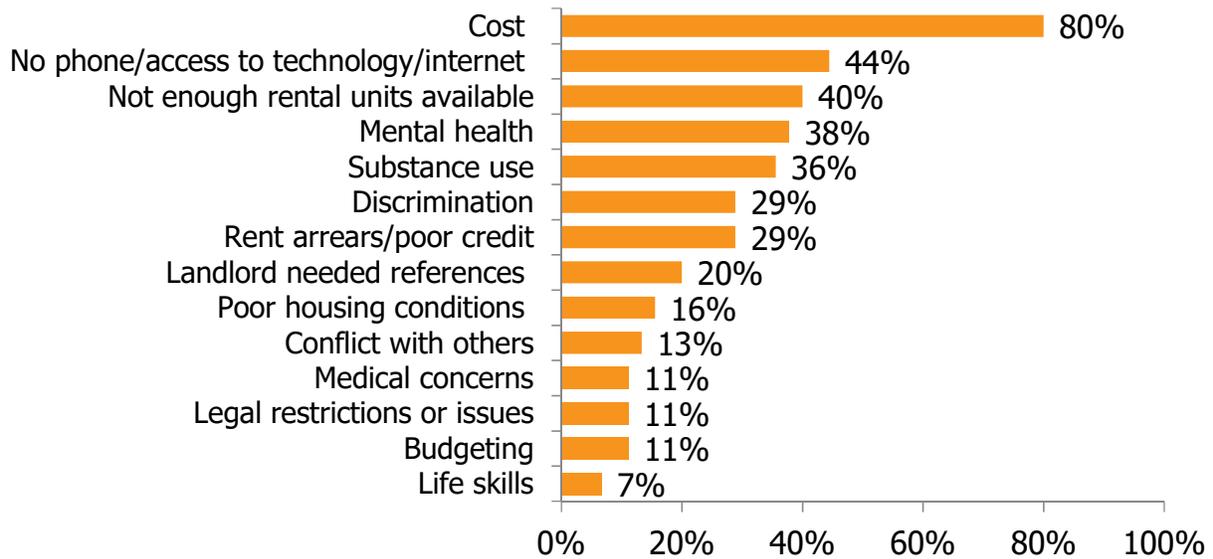
"Constantly being told to get out from other buildings is demeaning – no matter where I go, I am told to leave."
Andrea, currently couch surfing with family

Identifying gaps

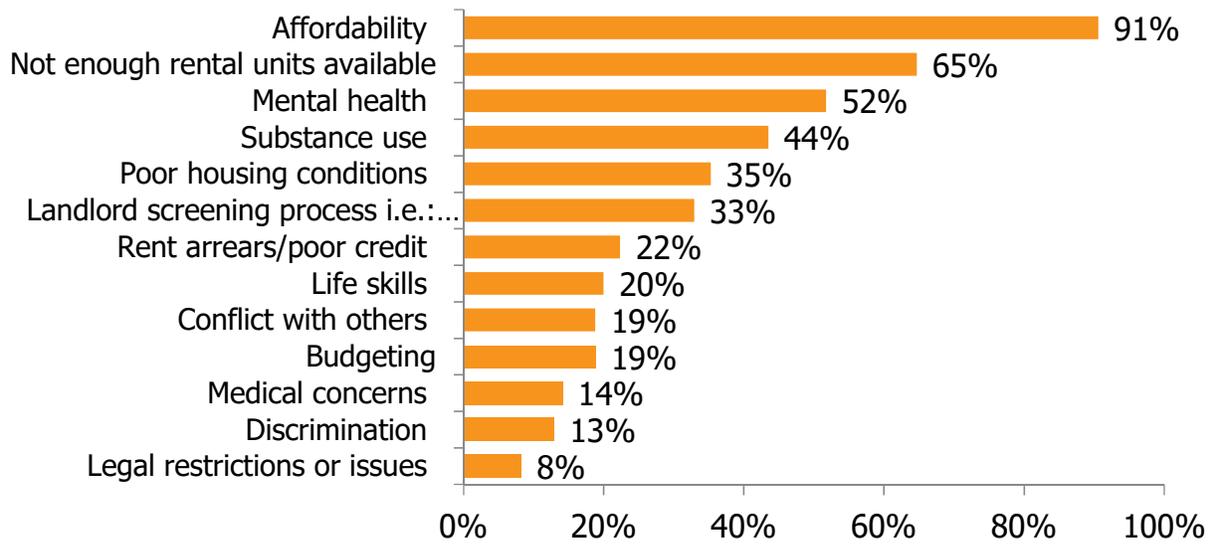
Housing Barriers

Housing Services designed the service user and provider surveys intentionally around the same questions and general themes so that we could examine service areas that may require additional support.

Service Users

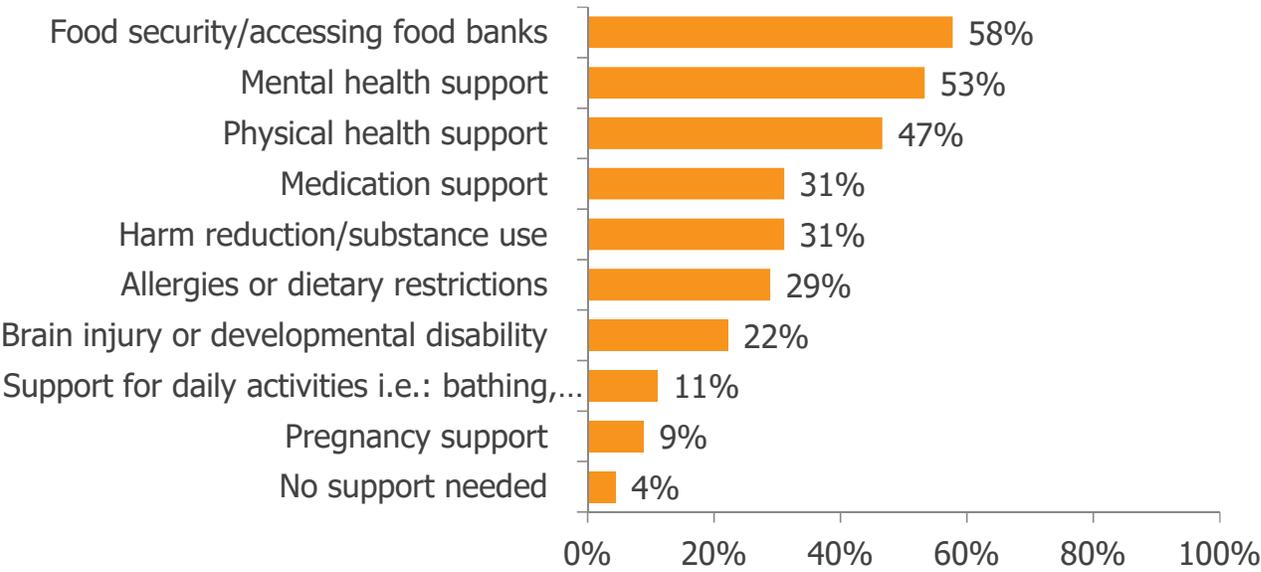


Service Providers

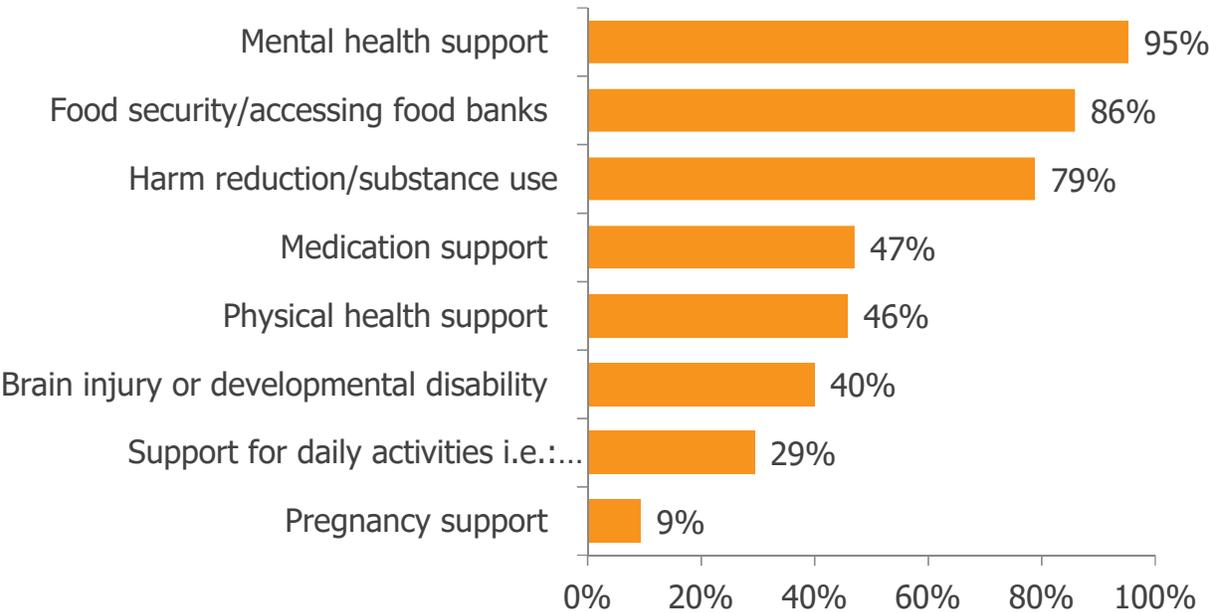


Health and wellness

Service Users

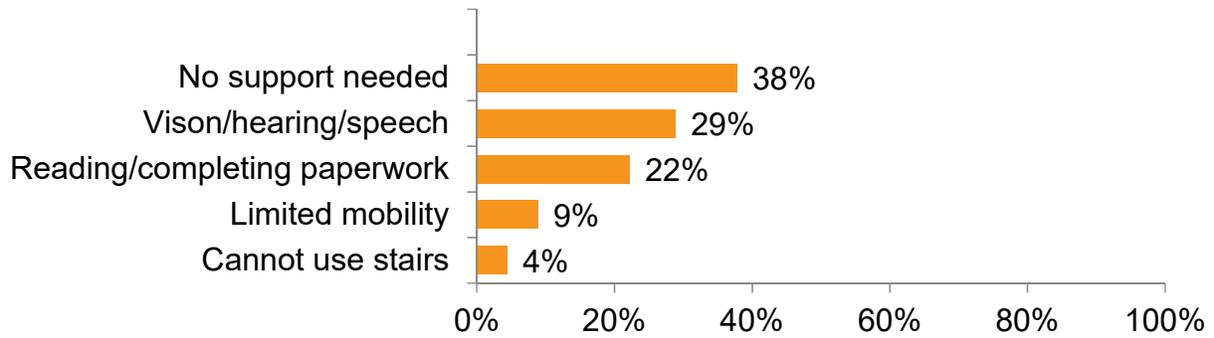


Service Providers

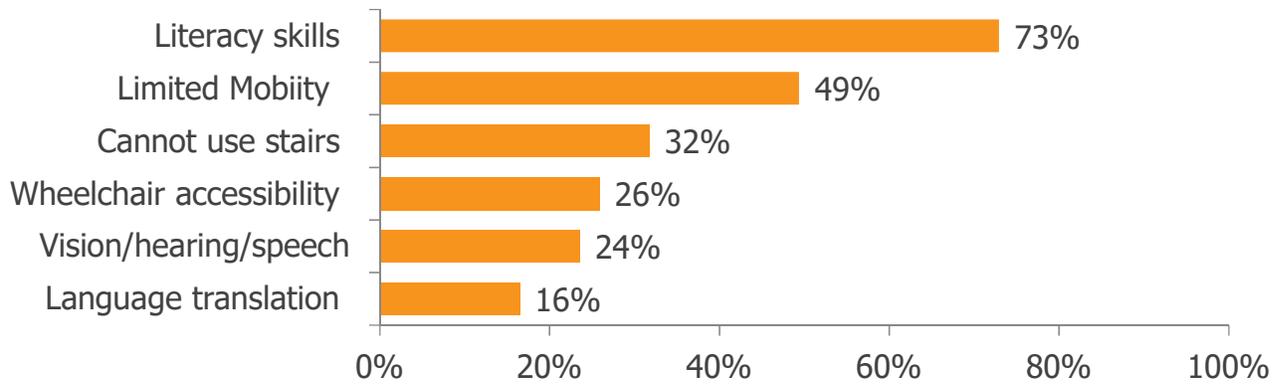


Accessibility

Service Users

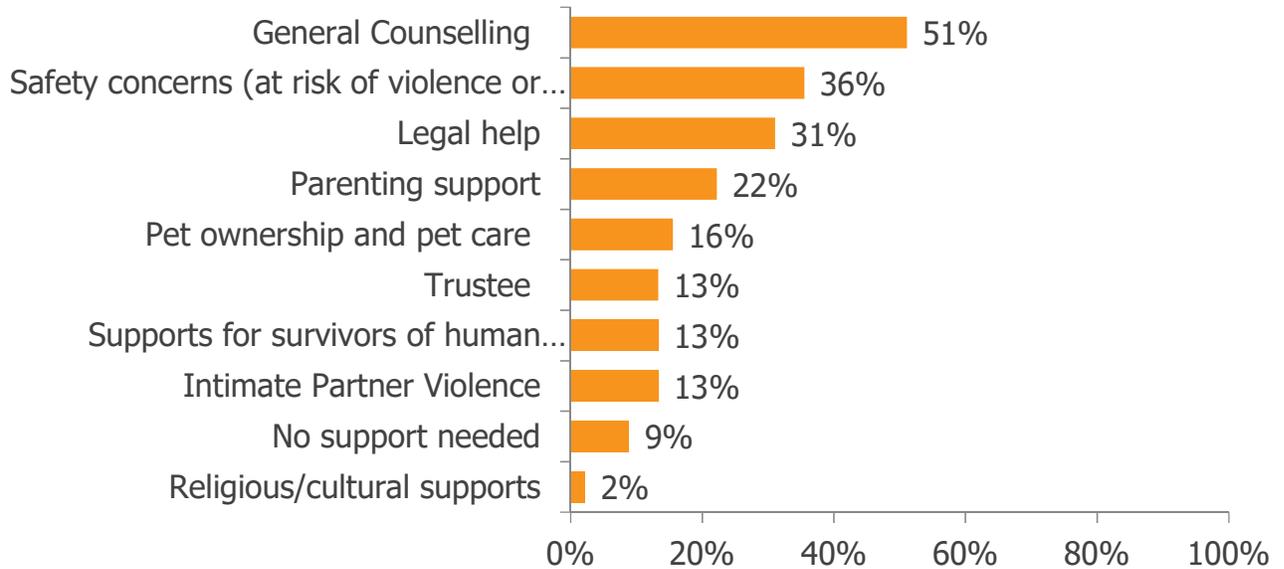


Service Providers

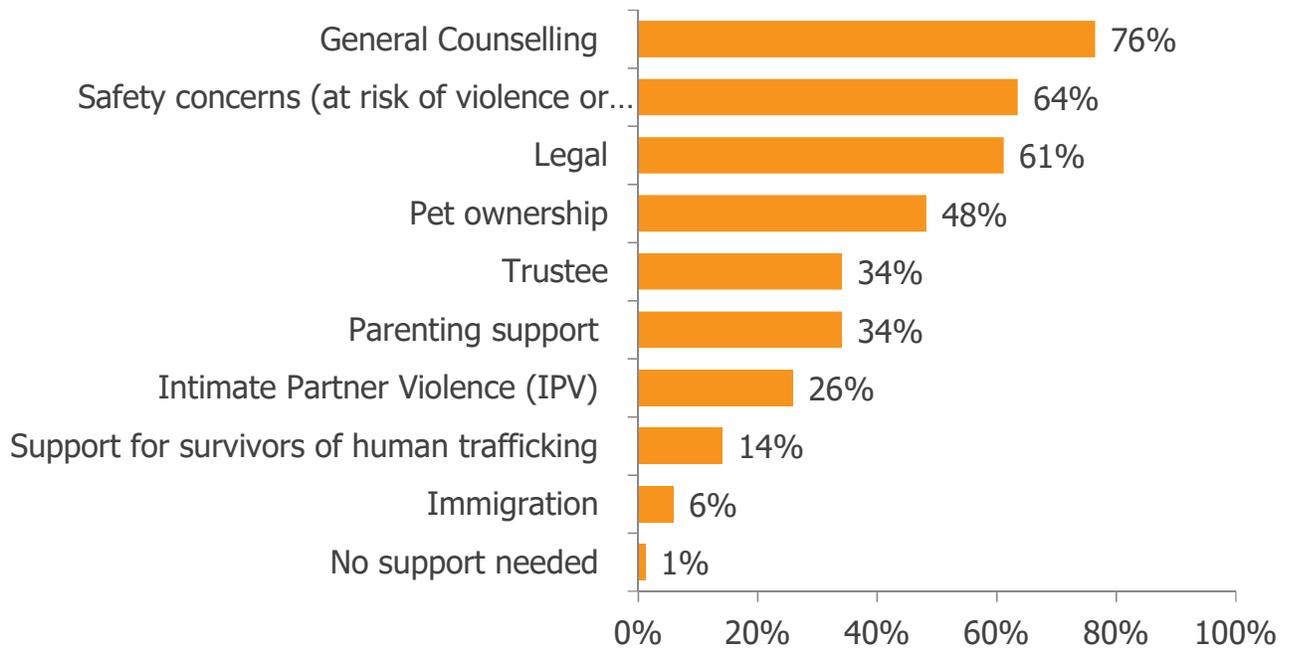


Other Supports

Service Users



Service Providers



Where do you want to live?

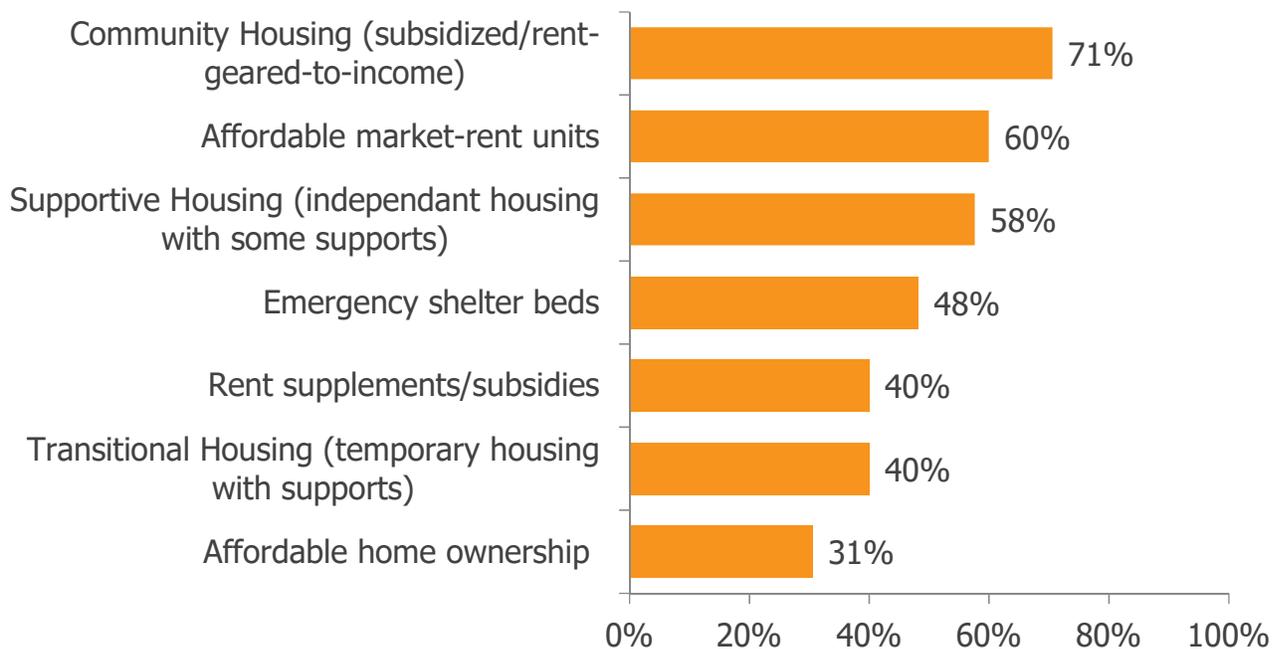
The majority of service users wanted an affordable, clean, safe, quiet 1 or 2-bedroom apartment that was accessible to amenities, secure and allowed family, friends and pets. Many respondents stated they would live anywhere, they just wanted somewhere. A large percentage would want no substance use or trafficking on site.

Clean, safe 1 or 2-bedroom apartment

Service Providers – what housing do we need?

Service providers expressed the greatest need for more Community Housing Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) units. It does appear from the responses that service users feel that a variety of housing types are needed in the community. Affordability seems to be the priority. Almost 50% shared that CKL-H requires more emergency shelter space.

71% feel we need more Community Housing options



Survey themes

Common themes shared by service users and providers

Urgency

This is a houselessness crisis, urgent action and attention is needed now.

It is not safe

The unhoused are subject to increasing levels of danger due to the current crisis and overall declining levels of mental well-being across the community. Those who are couch surfing or living on temporary sites are forced to survive in negative conditions, are vulnerable and live in a constant state of anxiety and fear and are in survival mode. Shelley, service provider in education echo's this feeling by suggesting we provide more, "opportunity to access affordable unit's vs making decisions to partner/live with others who are unstable."

There must be more "opportunity to access affordable unit's vs making decisions to partner/live with others who are unstable."
Shelley, service provider in education sector

Hopelessness

It is not surprising that the unhoused in our community feel hopeless, lost and unwelcome. Mat, a community service provider shares this, "The overall climate of the community is 'survival mode'. Individuals, even dual income households, struggle month to month, unable to enjoy life. This stimulates hopelessness and feelings of discouragement."

Housing

All respondents felt that affordable housing options are needed urgently. Improved wait times and creating more affordable, Rent-Geared-to-Income units is a necessity.

Emergency Shelter beds

In relation to emergency shelter, one statement appeared in almost every service user survey: "The shelter is always full." The majority of those surveyed state that there is an urgent need for overflow shelter beds that are available and open for everyone on a first come, first served basis with low barrier access that includes pets. Moreover, 48% of service providers agree that more emergency shelter beds are needed now and suggest developing more specialized shelter bed options for those with higher needs.

“Rural areas have no shelter or temporary/transitional beds or options so we are forced to move to Lindsay to get any services and in Lindsay there are dangerous spots and substance use”
Tommy, couch surfing/sleeping rough

A local service provider shared this, “Have more specialized shelter beds available for clients who are hard to serve. Some clients are unable to maintain any housing due to substance use or other behavioural issues. It makes it difficult when client's have been evicted, are not eligible for housing or who have been banned from the shelter system. These clients are always going to be homeless until any underlying problems are resolved...”

Tommy, a man couch surfing when he can or otherwise sleeping in a shed shared this, “Rural areas have no shelter or temporary/transitional beds or options so we are forced to move to Lindsay to get any services and in Lindsay there are dangerous spots and substance use.”

“It makes it difficult when client's have been evicted, are not eligible for housing or who have been banned from the shelter system. These clients are always going to be homeless until any underlying problems are resolved...” Service provider

Basic needs are not being met

By far, service users and providers share that more attention is needed to address the basic needs of the unhoused in our community. Greater and easier access to hot meals, shower/washroom facilities and clothing is needed urgently. Lack of access to consistent and low barrier medical, mental health and substance use care is a concern. Most service users shared they do not have a doctor and will avoid going to the hospital emergency room.

Transportation that is accessible and affordable

There is an emerging trend that transportation is not accessible and inclusive. Service users choose to walk because it is faster, even across town. One man who just recently gained transitional housing shared that people need affordable transportation and should be provided bus tokens without charge. One individual we spoke with had been kicked out of the home by a parent and walked from Omeme to Lindsay.

“Our lack of transportation is one of the main barriers to folks finding and sustaining employment. It is absolutely necessary to find a solution to this or folks will continue to struggle.” Janice, service provider

From the perspective of service providers, transportation costs eat up valuable resources. Janice, who provides support for community members shares this, “we need affordable transportation. While service providers are able to help with some of the cost, we are using a lot of our funding to simply get clients to and from services, and employment. The only option here is an over-priced taxi company. Our lack of transportation is one of the main barriers to folks finding and sustaining employment. It is absolutely necessary to find a solution to this or folks will continue to struggle.”

Accessible Mental Health services including substance use

A lack of low barrier, accessible mental healthcare is a concern for both service users and providers. Janice shares, “we know that those facing homelessness have more healthcare problems - lack of accessible mental health and substance use supports” is a service gap.

Counselling

Both groups shared that free general counselling is something that is needed but not available. 76% service providers believed General Counselling is needed; 51% of service users felt the same.

**76% service providers believed Counselling is needed;
51% of service users felt the same**

Training

Increased training is a common theme from all who participated but especially, service users who experience high levels of discrimination, stigma and trauma and who feel unwelcomed anywhere.

“better training for ALL staff that could interact with people experiencing homelessness - better strategies than just calling the police.” Service provider

A city staff member shared this, “better training for ALL staff that could interact with people experiencing homelessness - better strategies than just calling the police.” There is a need for increased training related to overdoses in our community as several service users noted they commonly provide first aid to others even when paid staff are on-site.

Service users shared their unique insights

Unification with children, importance of loved ones

Overall, there are several themes which emerged related to families and housing. First, many respondents shared that they have been restricted and evicted from the family home due to relationship breakdown. In many cases, the original precipitant to homelessness was due to a family boundary which removed or restricted them from their last place to stay.

“I want to have enough room for my son, if it’s too small he would not be allowed to visit. Not having housing keeps me away from my son.” Andrea, couch-surfing

Second, most respondents want housing that can accommodate children and family. Moreover, having a safe, quiet and clean unit represents an opportunity to unify the family and repair relationships. Andrea, a mother of a young son who is currently couch surfing after being released from jail into homelessness, shares, “I want to have enough room for my son, if it’s too small he would not be allowed to visit. Not having housing keeps me away from my son.”

Reducing Stigma, increasing awareness

Bethany is a young woman in her 30’s who is currently couch surfing and recently lost her bed at the emergency shelter. She shares after trying to get a bed at the shelter for over 3 months, she finally secured a spot, but lost it after only a few days due to having harm reduction supplies in her possession.

“even with rent paid direct, landlords won’t rent to me – I always had a clean and kept home and given what I have gone through, I would value and respect a space even more.” Bethany, restricted from shelter, couch surfing

Bethany feels the pain and shame of community stigma deeply. She shares her feelings about local landlords and the need to build stronger partnerships and “encourage

private landlords to be open to those on OW or income assistance. Reduce or address the stigma from landlords.” Bethany continues, “even with rent paid direct, landlords won’t rent to me – I always had a clean and kept home and given what I have gone through, I would value and respect a space even more.”

Outreach Services that are consistent, long-term and individualized

The unhoused in Haliburton, Minden and area rely heavily on outreach services and want increased long-term outreach services. Melanie, living with her two dogs in a vehicle in Haliburton area shared this, “allow outreach workers to not be only temporary, once a person connects with someone you need that support, then it’s ripped out and taken away.”

“Outreach – they really help me to connect with other important organizations. They actually care about the average Joe. Very respectful and kind.” Gary, evicted from housing due to having pets

Gary, a man living with his two dogs in an abandoned building, was evicted due to his animals. For him, Outreach has helped him make connections. Gary shares, “Outreach – they really help me to connect with other important organizations. They actually care about the average Joe. Very respectful and kind.”

Just trying to survive

Overwhelmingly, respondents shared that most of their time spent during the day is spent accessing or attempting to secure basic necessities of life such as food and water, clothing, shower/washroom. Respondents must walk or bike around to various agencies providing outreach services (often more than one) to ensure their daily needs are met. On average, a respondent is connecting with outreach services at the shelter, the John Howard Society (JHS), Salvation Army and a food bank or soup kitchen each day.

Food

Food security and low barrier access remains a concern. Respondents suggest an increase in access to food and hot meals such as soup kitchens or a food pantry. Many noted that accessing food support is not easy without transportation or phones. That “being in survival mode” makes it a challenge to make it to appointments on time or within service hours.

Clothing and basic hygiene needs

Respondents noted that although donations are made to agencies by the community, often these do not reach those in need. Agencies may sell them or restrict access to bins rather than simply offer the items for free. This is seen as unfair.

Computer, phones

No or limited access to phone and technology is a large barrier for service users to stay connected and access basic needs such as food and income, but also to reasonably search for employment or housing.

Lack of sleep and safety

The threat of violence or harm is high for respondents. Many shared that they feel constantly un-safe and vulnerable to violence, theft, abuse or subject to unpredictability or instability of others. Those living rough or in vehicles report that their belongings are stolen daily and/or destroyed. One individual taking shelter in her vehicle currently has been subjected to a long history of abuse, trafficking and violent crimes. She shares "I don't sleep anymore. I don't feel safe anywhere."

"I don't sleep anymore. I don't feel safe anywhere." Human trafficking survivor, living in vehicle

Couch surfers are subject to negative and unpredictable living conditions and are often forced, due to circumstances to tolerate abuse, substance use and violence due to their vulnerability. Being forced to live in a negative environment was a recurring theme.

Wandering

The largest common theme of this survey is aimlessness, boredom and lack of meaningful activities. This is most commonly expressed as wandering during the day, being outside with no particular destination or no place to go. Overwhelmingly, this is shared sentiment across all demographics. Andrea, couch surfing currently shares that there is "nothing for anyone to do, especially in winter."

Wandering involves visiting the library, visiting friends, and/or spending time in parks and public areas.

"Nothing for anyone to do, especially in winter." Andrea, couch surfing

Those who had a place to stay even temporarily, felt compelled during the day to get out so as not to overstay a welcome, to get out of the negative situation or to just reduce boredom. Visiting coffee shops such as Tim Hortons was noted as a way of having some shelter for a few hours. Agencies that allow drop ins to visit and stay even temporarily are also frequented.

Isolation

Of those who had access to housing or were staying with friends and family, an interesting theme of isolation emerged. These respondents report staying at home which contrasts the wandering theme. This seems to be of the same root but expressed differently – the root of isolating at home and wandering are related to lack of a place that welcomes them and provides meaningful purpose and socialization.

Emergency Shelter Services

Emergency shelter staff in our community are well loved and all respondents either have stayed at the shelter or use the outreach, trustee or aftercare services. Service users shared that the staff are supportive and services are very helpful for day-to-day survival.

Policies and Communication

Service users share frustration with inconsistency or lack of understanding related to accessing housing services and emergency shelter. Many individuals reported they felt unsure about who is accepted into the shelter and how to secure a spot. Some individuals reported there is a wait list to secure an emergency shelter bed and some individuals reported that they feel they will be restricted based on previous issues with past shelter stays. Some policies were viewed as restrictive, biased and many respondents stated that the shelter is “playing favourites.”

Outreach Program

Because food security and access to washrooms/showers are major daily challenges, the community relies greatly on the local shelter’s outreach program which runs 24/7. Mitch who is currently unhoused shared his experiences recently, “Outreach meals are restricted to 11:30 – 12:30 and you only get one meal. Used to show up at different times to get meals but now I’m not allowed. A one-hour window for meals is not enough when fighting to stay alive takes up all my time.”

“A one-hour window for meals is not enough when fighting to stay alive takes up all my time.” Mitch, unhoused, living rough

Supportive Housing

Residents and guests who live or visit 68 Lindsay Street North, in Lindsay, reported frustration with the implementation of new security measures. Andrea who is couch surfing at 68 shared this, “it’s honestly like being in prison, I am under the microscope, security and cameras – I tried to start a tenant’s association but I was evicted.”

As part of various security measures and program changes that have occurred over the last 18 months at 68 Lindsay Street North to improve the overall program and address safety concerns, staff acknowledge that the results of these changes have displaced several people who don't currently have any available options for alternative housing or emergency shelter. The learnings and experiences of 68 Lindsay Street North have demonstrated the need for an alternative supportive housing program that provides low-barrier primary care, mental health and addiction supports, along with 24/7 housing support staff.

Discrimination

There is a deep discrimination felt by community members. This is mirrored in the data as a barrier. John, struggling to pay the bills for his house shared this, "Everyone gets discriminated against for the problems in town. People don't respect anyone, feels like it will be an uproar."

What do we need?

Connection

In response to a question asking what our community needs, overwhelmingly the statements related to a drop-in centre or place to spend time during the day where social activities including sports and volunteering could be offered to reduce boredom, depression and hopelessness. At this drop-in centre, community members could consistently access services and goods needed as well as build connections to one another, agencies and the community as a whole.

Compassion and Empathy

There is an urgent need for social action to increase community awareness and education around homelessness in Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton County. The stigma and discrimination felt by the respondents is clear. They are calling for us to increase compassion and empathy on a personal and community level.

"treat people differently, encourage and support instead of calling people junkies and criminals." Andrea, senior couch surfing

Andrea, a senior woman couch surfing currently shares that our community needs, "More compassion, understanding and empathy. All human beings have been let down so what do you expect? People feel unwanted, throw-away people" who are "starving for love and attention." Andrea urges us to "treat people differently, encourage and support instead of calling people junkies and criminals."

Agencies

Overall, community members shared they like all local agencies and access many as they all have something to provide. Those we surveyed access as many services as they can. Maria, a woman currently homeless and living in her vehicle stated, "I use all my resources. The more people involved the less I suffer."

"I use all my resources. The more people involved the less I suffer." Maria, living in vehicle

Many folks shared that all agencies are good but more resources are needed to improve wait times for things like counselling. Allan who is homeless and couch surfing with friends shared this, "The agencies are not too bad, but they are stretched thin with staff."

A man recently accepted into the TIP program at 68 shared that agencies are "Understaffed, overwhelmed, but very good. We need more funding and more 24-hour response. When there is a crisis, we need someone to call who can help."

Accessibility & Services

The survey highlighted some opportunities to decrease barriers for community members who are unhoused. Interactions happen most frequently in parks, the Library and at service provider locations.

Coordination and Communication

Respondents stated a need for agencies to reduce compartmentalized services and increase coordination across all services. "Start working together" is a common theme. Mathew who is living rough and sometimes couch surfs shares that our community needs "More communication between all agencies – not all the right information is shared." He also wants clarity around rules, policies and "who gets what and why."

"More communication between all agencies – not all the right information is shared." Mathew, living in encampment or couch-surfing

Allan who is couch surfing with friend's shares "Everyone needs to work together; it seems like they don't want to work together."

Phones/Internet and Appointments

Service users did not have an address for traditional mail, access to a phone or email and thus, traditional communication methods require some evaluation. Most respondents indicated that standard appointment calendars and regular operating

business hours do not work when “in survival mode.” Often, missing appointments results in loss of services or restricted access to funds, etc. A good example of this is required updates for Income Assistance which are seen as impossible to complete and which create conflict and barriers.

“Things are unstable; no schedule makes it hard to access all services. Do I eat or go to John Howard?” Mathew, couch surfing

Mathew currently living in an encampment shares this, “Things are unstable, no schedule makes it hard to access all services. Do I eat or go to John Howard?”

Completion of Paperwork, ID and Documents

Library staff, who interact and support many community members identify a common barrier, “I see individuals who have little to no computer/ tech literacy, which in today’s society is often required to find housing. There are also those who need assistance with legal forms, court documents, etc. which are sometimes beyond the scope of assistance that we are able to provide.” As is reflected in the peer surveys, 22% stated they required support with paperwork completion and 73% of stakeholders agreed this was a service need.

22% stated they required support with paperwork completion, 73% of stakeholders agreed

Dennis who had to flee from his unit which was taken over shares, “I can afford to rent a room but without any paperwork, ID or credit and references checks, I can’t get in – I want to work but no ID, no phone”.

Increasing awareness to decrease stigma – Nothing about us without us

Individuals shared they feel discriminated against in the community and want social action to increase awareness – they want to actively take a lead in community engagement. Allan shares this, “Look at the people that are trying and recognize they have issues and understand they’re looking for help or are trying. Give people a chance. Those chances matter to us. Homelessness is such a drain. It makes everything else impossible to keep up with.”

Service provider surveys: a review of open question themes

What is at stake

Overall, service providers in the community share that this is an urgent crisis that needs coordinated efforts now. Jackie, a frontline worker shares this: “people will die if we do not work diligently to resolve this housing crisis. We need everyone in the community in positions of power to stop having conversations about this, we need action. We know what the problems are and we know what to do to fix things. Otherwise we will see more and more folks in crisis, slipping through the cracks that this system has.”

“people will die if we do not work diligently to resolve this housing crisis” Jackie, frontline service provider

Reduce Poverty and create affordable housing

A central theme emerged from both service users and service providers related to income and housing. Clearly, the gap between income and affordability continues to increase and is greatly felt across the service area in the area of housing costs and stock. All individuals surveyed expressed the urgent need to reduce poverty by increasing income and creating affordable housing options now. A variety of creative ways were shared to increase income including subsidies, increasing income limits and rent caps. A service provider from education sector shared this:

“Affordability is by far the biggest issue I see. We’ve seen housing and rent prices jump drastically as people with better incomes (i.e.: from the cities) have moved north. The people who have lived for years in this community do not have city houses to sell, and the jobs are much lower paying on average. People who work regularly are struggling because expenses are just so high in comparison to wages.”

“Affordability is by far the biggest issue I see”, Service provider, education sector

Increase Emergency Shelter Space Urgently

The majority of service providers want increased and accessible shelter beds/space overall and specifically for the County and for youth aged 16 and under.

Holistic Approach, Integrated Wellness

Service providers are interested in holistic services and supports that address the underlying or root causes of houselessness. There are clearly three areas of key interest 1) medical/physical health 2) mental health and 3) substance use. Across all surveys,

these three areas of wellness were noted as service gaps and/or barriers for community members experiencing homelessness.

Respondents stated that the current services provided in these areas are not sufficient and in most cases, not available. A service provider from the housing sector, Laura, shares that our community needs, “a holistic approach to improving living conditions such as showers, meals, laundry, a place to visit/stay for the day (social connections), a hub for overall health and wellness.” The need for medical care (both urgent and non-urgent) that integrates mental health, including substance use is great.

“a holistic approach to improving living conditions such as showers, meals, laundry, a place to visit/stay for the day (social connections), a hub for overall health and wellness.”
Laura, service provider, housing sector

In this regard, advocacy, community engagement and awareness is urgently needed to further this discussion of mental illness and substance use – both health concerns that remain highly stigmatized and creates further barriers for community members who try to access services within a divided system. Stakeholders are shedding light on the gaps by sharing where/what we need the most. That includes long-term, free counselling services, intensive case management, intensive housing support workers, increased outreach workers and system navigation supports plus flexible and personalized employment options. Ultimately, the root causes of homelessness should be addressed community wide.

Embrace creative solutions

Respondents shared many creative ideas and solutions for our community and this spirit of creativity and collaboration is apparent. Suggestions also included looking to other communities for inspiration or ideas and attempting to incorporate them into our work in the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Needs of individuals living rough and/or couch surfing

Increase access to basic needs for service users is top of mind across all respondents and all questions. Food, washroom/showers, and access to basic health care are essential needs that all agree are vital. Basic health care would address medical, mental and emotional well-being (mental health and substance use).

Food and access to showers/washrooms and health are the top three needs (other than housing).

A safe consumption site, detox and rehabilitation facility are mentioned repeatedly throughout the needs review and noted both from service users and providers.

Drop in Centre/Warming or Cooling Room

The majority of respondents expressed a need for some type of drop in centre that provides low-barrier access to the vital basic necessities such as food, washrooms/showers as well as respite, rest and connection to meaningful daily activities and others.

Vulnerability of couch surfers in our community

In addition to the basic needs already discussed, there were a few key themes associated with couch surfing that emerged. Personal safety for those currently staying with others as guests is concerning and includes being abused, taken advantage of emotionally, physically and sexually. It was noted that sex is traded for couch space and often the conditions in the units are poor and overcrowded. This was also expressed in the peer surveys wherein those who were couch surfing expressed high levels of fear for personal safety and fear of violence from others.

“To be treated with respect and understanding by all. A safe place to gather, with supports and access to shower and washroom facilities”. Service provider, manager

Stipends or increasing funds somehow so that couch surfers could contribute to rent and reduce vulnerability was noted repeatedly. Also, having access to long term counselling supports and housing-based community management was also noted to be a need seen by service providers. A frontline manager shared, “Free “general counseling” for people living in instability. This service does not exist in the community, but should!”

Service providers shared a common sentiment that those individuals who are couch surfing in our community are hopeless, feel worthless and isolated. Management in another service sector shared that those couch surfing need “To be treated with respect and understanding by all. A safe place to gather, with supports and access to shower and washroom facilities”.

During the winter of 2023, Kawartha Lakes-Haliburton Housing Corporation implemented an enhanced guest policy that supports approved guests to officially reside in the unit beyond the typical guest time limitations. This option allows tenants to be transparent and compliant of guest obligations as they pertain to eligibility surrounding RGI housing, while supporting the couch-surfing guest to have a legitimate place to stay while not causing their roommate to be at risk of homelessness. At the time of this report, it is believed that this option is relatively underutilized.

Flexible 360 Support

Extended support for those who are supporting others was noted in relation to couch surfing. This includes early intervention of family supports to reduce or repair relationship breakdown often relating to mental health issues including substance use. Provide more support for those that are attempting to help or shelter others while waiting for RGI units or shelter beds, etc. And finally, provide support when and where you can – for example, if individuals present at shelter, hospital or in a community building, provide care.

Winter Response to homelessness

Overwhelmingly, service users and providers feel that emergency shelter beds and/or a warming centre should be opened for the winter. Increasing access to hot meals, and coats/boots were also top of mind. Investigate creative solutions such as partnering with churches, businesses and private citizens to use existing unused space such as church basements or un-rented rooms in motels/resorts.

As seen throughout this project, Haliburton County and rural areas need shelter beds now. Overflow space, whether it be shelter or sleeping space/warming room should be low barrier and allow pets. Transportation should be coordinated so that travel is easy and free to other options in winter months.

The City of Kawartha Lakes has used COVID-19 Relief funding over the last three winters to temporarily increase emergency shelter for both residents in Kawartha Lakes and the County of Haliburton, by placing households in motels, and increasing resources at the emergency shelter to increase shelter capacity. This same response will be in place for the 2023-2024 winter season, while staff and community partners uses responses from these surveys to expand our shelter system for future winters.

Calls to Action

Anti-Oppressive Framework

A frontline service provider in the employment sector shared, “When referring to homeless individuals; use the word people and take into consideration an anti-oppressive framework to be mindful of the systems of oppression or isms, racism, colonialism, sexism, classism, ableism, that result in discrimination and stigmatization from society.”

Community Engagement

This includes focus groups and working groups to explore emerging topics and creative solutions including looking at what other communities are doing to address the unhoused. A service provider shares, “We need public consultations, public meetings, community councils and members to connect and share ideas to create access.

Townships need to understand the red tape delays are causing many to leave, live in a car or trailer, and lose hope.”

“Promote community helping others in need – people don’t know enough about the needs.” Service provider in rural area

Community awareness and engagement must be initiated and improved. Mathew shares his ideas, “Promote community helping others in need – people don’t know enough about the needs.”

Increase emergency beds

Urgent addition of emergency shelter beds and basic needs for the County is apparent but overwhelmingly, both service users and providers call for additional shelter space to be created across the system.

Vulnerable

Protect/provide increased support for youth and those with developmental disabilities.

Address underserved populations

According to the respondents, the following groups are underserved or not served at all:

- Rural citizens
- Youth (16 and under)
- Those with developmental disabilities
- Marginally employed or “working poor”
- Single income households
- Those requiring general health care including mental health and substance use disorders
- Adults with chronic mental health issues

Capturing creative solutions

Respondents generously shared creative ideas for change:

- On the Spot Job Fair, companies can connect direct
- Issue free gym memberships (reduce boredom, increase wellbeing)
- Potlucks or BBQ’s in buildings, community
- Free community events
- Medical detox (local)
- Local rehabilitation centre or beds
- Extended low barrier service hours
- Increase naloxone training and overdoes prevention widely
- Access to free or low cost vet care
- Allow pets in emergency shelter

- Increase Food Drop boxes at stores (easy access)
- Low Barrier access to medical care, health care
- Outdoor lockers or small free storage space
- 12 Step recovery groups in shelter and housing sites (AA, CA)
- Donation boxes should be open to all (not locked or restricted)
- Complaint department with investigation and accountability
- Allow camp areas and provide washrooms
- Increase intensive housing-focused case management
- Moving supplement
- Tiny homes, garden homes, creative temp housing solutions
- True cost of living subsidies
- Centralized Housing support/crisis line
- Increase tenant's rights education re: renovating, room rentals
- Market Rent cap
- Purpose built units for various populations with complex needs
- Protect tenant rights including pets
- Habitat for Humanity development partnerships
- Service integration
- Mandate single rental units to provide a percentage of unit space (Airbnb)
- Mandate percentages of property development
- Invest in developing life skills for youth and young adults (prevention)
- Re-introduce Basic Income program
- Re-purpose abandoned or empty buildings in town
- Build volunteering network
- Safe consumption/injection site
- Free activities for those living in poverty/connecting isolated seniors with groups
- Pass temp by laws allowing RV's or cars to park as needed

Conclusion

Limitations of this study

Peer surveys capture the individual's experiences related to the question. Those completing the stakeholder survey must evaluate and assess the clients they interact with and their needs overall and provide their own perspective on this. This difference should be noted.

Added/edited missing pieces for readability like "the" or "and" but no other changes to statements. The quotations have been directly stated by the respondents and captured word for word.

One individual reviewed responses to open ended questions of both service user and provider surveys two times to code for themes (thematic review). The themes presented in this report are those ideas, statements and response that occurred the most frequently across the responses. The most frequently talked about topics and responses were then organized into larger themes.

Recommendations or next steps

It is recommended that a Peer-led committee be organized that evaluates and discusses the themes and ideas brought forth through this project. Peers or people with lived experiences must be fairly compensated and ideally paid in cash for contributions. It is recommended that payment in gift card be modified to cash payments for future initiatives.

It is also recommended that community engagement and advocacy work that purposely focuses on decreasing stigma and discrimination as well as increases awareness in the overall community be initiated urgently.

Municipal Services

The survey highlighted an opportunity to improve The CKL-H diversity, equity and inclusion practices across many services that are frequently used by the unhoused and those living in unsecured housing. Interactions happen most frequently in parks, library and at service locations. For municipal staff who engage with individuals across the city, trauma-informed practices could be explored. This approach is based on an understanding that those we encounter have trauma and this affects how they interact and communicate (Wolf et al., 2014).

This brief review and report has only scratched the surface. It has provided the opportunity for those who best understand housing needs and service gaps in our community – those who experience it every day – and live it - and those professionals

that work with them. As affordable housing options are built and developed across the nation, the crisis continues for many.

Yet, there is an inspirational sense of resiliency to overcome challenges from both service users and providers. There is hope in these interviews and surveys which demonstrate commitment to creative collaborative solutions to address the common barriers to secure housing and gaps in services provided.

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Appendix A: Service User Interview Questions

Housing Services would like your feedback about current housing needs and service gaps in our community. Responses will be reviewed and may help inform upcoming program development and planning. We appreciate your time and feedback.

- Your answers may be used in a report but we will not share your name. Our goal is to improve services for the community by getting your honest feedback and ideas. Are you OK with this?

Yes No

- Name First Last
- Phone Number ### - ### - ####
- Email
- If you don't have an email right now, what's the best way to get a hold of you?

- Age

- Gender

- What would you say is your primary community?

Lindsay Fenelon Falls Bobcaygeon Minden Haliburton Other

- What best describes you?

Single Adult Youth (16-24) Senior (60+) Couple Family Under 15 Prefer not to answer

- If the category is not listed, please describe below.

- LGBTQIA2S+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit + anything else you may identify yourself. Do you identify with any of these or any not listed?

Yes No Maybe Prefer not to answer

- The term "Indigenous" includes First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. Do you identify with any of these groups?

No First Nations (status, non-status, treaty, non-treaty) Inuit Métis
 Prefer not to answer

- People may describe themselves by their race or racial background. Which category best describes you?

Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian (examples: Afghan, Armenian, Iranian, Lebanese, Persian, Turkish) Black (examples: African, African-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean) East Asian (examples: Chinese, Japanese, Korean) First Nations (status, non-status, treaty, non-treaty), Inuit or Métis Latin American (examples: Brazilian, Columbian, Cuban, Mexican, Peruvian) South Asian or Indo-Caribbean (examples: Indian, Indo-Guyanese, Indo-Trinidadian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan) Southeast Asian (examples: Filipino, Malaysian, Singaporean, Thai, Vietnamese) White (examples: English, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Slovakian) Prefer not to answer

- If the category is not listed or you are from more than one background (mixed race) please describe below.

- Have you ever served in the Canadian military or RCMP?
 - No Canadian Military (Navy, Army or Air Force) RCMP Both Canadian Military and RCMP Military outside of Canada Prefer not to answer Unknown

- Do you have pets?
 - Yes No

- Are you interested in participating in future opportunities to share your feedback?
 - Yes, please contact me in the future No

- Where did you sleep last night? Choose as many as you need.
 - Abandoned building Hospital Long Term Care Facility Shed/garage
 - Family (couch surfing) Friends (couch surfing) Jail Motel/hotel Emergency shelter Vehicle Seasonal trailer or cottage Bus shelter Detox/treatment centre Park Encampment Sidewalk/ground Library
 - Prefer not to answer I have secure housing

- Other

- Reason for current housing situation. Choose as many as you need.
 - Discharged from jail Discharged from hospital Discharged from shelter
 - Restricted from shelter Eviction by landlord Eviction by family/friends
 - Foreclosure Refugee Relationship breakdown Relocating Abuse
 - Decided to leave housing Fire or other disaster Unit was taken over Stranded in the area

- Other

- If you were restricted or evicted from housing, can you tell us why.



- What are the current barriers you face to secure housing? Choose as many as you need.

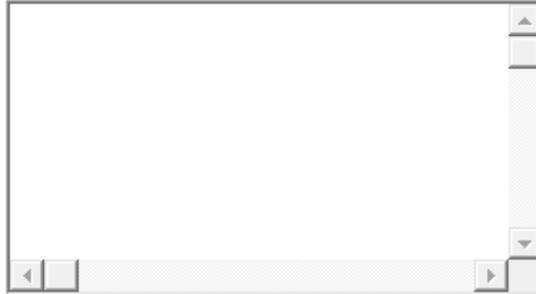
- Cost Not enough rental units available Substance use Mental health
- Life skills Budgeting Rent arrears/poor credit Landlord needed references Conflict with others Legal restrictions or issues Medical concerns Discrimination Poor housing conditions No phone/access to technology/internet

- Other

- I would like to know more about Health and Wellness needs you may have. Choose as many as you need.

- Allergies or dietary restrictions Harm reduction/substance use Medication support Pregnancy support Mental health support Physical health support Brain injury or developmental disability Support for daily activities i.e.: bathing, eating Food security/accessing food banks No support needed

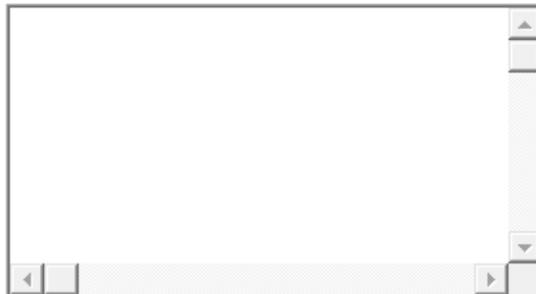
- Are there any details about these needs that you want to share?



- I would like to know more about Accessibility needs you may have. Choose as many as you need.

- Cannot use stairs Limited mobility Wheelchair accessibility
- Vision/hearing/speech Language translation Reading/completing paperwork
- No support needed

- Are there any details about these needs that you want to share?



- I would like to know more about Other support needs you may have. Choose as many as you need.

- Pet ownership and pet care Legal help Immigration supports
- Religious/cultural supports Safety concerns (at risk of violence or self-harm)
- Intimate Partner Violence Supports for survivors of human trafficking
- Parenting support General Counselling Trustee No support needed

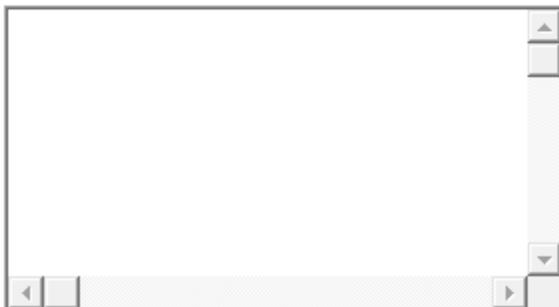
- Are there any details about these needs that you want to share?



- Describe housing that would be ideal for you and your family. Provide as much detail as you can.



- What services or agencies do you really like or dislike? Please share why.



- Where do you spend your time during the day?

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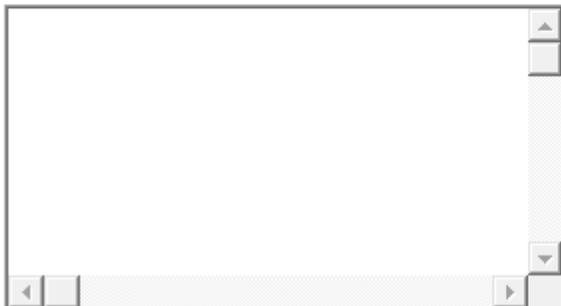
- What do you think our community needs?

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- If you could speak directly to folks who make the policies or rules regarding housing, what suggestions would you have for them?

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- Is there anything else you would like to share?

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Service Provider Online Survey

Housing Services would like your thoughts about current housing needs and service gaps in our community. Responses will be reviewed and may help inform upcoming program development and planning. We appreciate your time and feedback.

- Aggregated results and de-identified feedback may be included in a brief written report. Do you consent to your feedback being included anonymously?

Yes No

- Name First Last
- Email
- What best describes your role?

Frontline worker in housing/homelessness sector Frontline worker in another social service sector Management/administration Other

- How long have you worked with your organization?

0 - 3 years 3 - 6 years 6 - 9 years 9+ years

- What barriers to housing do individuals that you serve face most frequently. Please select top three (3).

Affordability Low stock Substance use Mental health Life skills
 Budgeting Rent arrears/poor credit Landlord screening process i.e.: references, credit checks etc. Conflict with others Legal restrictions or issues
 Medical concerns Discrimination Poor housing conditions No phone/access to technology/internet Other (specify below)

- Other

- What Health & Wellness support needs do individuals that you serve most commonly have. Choose all that apply.

Allergies or dietary restrictions Harm reduction/substance use Medication support Pregnancy support Mental health support Physical health support Brain injury or developmental disability Support for daily activities i.e.: eating, bathing Food security/accessing food banks No support needed Other (specify below)

- Other

- What Accessibility support needs do individuals that you serve most commonly have. Choose all that apply.

Cannot use stairs Limited Mobility Wheelchair accessibility Vision/hearing/speech Language translation Literacy skills No support needed Other (specify below)

- Other

- What Other support needs do individuals that you serve most commonly have. Choose all that apply.

Pet ownership Legal Immigration Religious/cultural supports Safety concerns (at risk of violence or self harm) Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Support for survivors of human trafficking Parenting support General Counselling Trustee No support needed Other (specify below)

- Other

- Which populations do you feel are not adequately served? Please select top three (3).

Seniors Single adults Veterans Youth Families Indigenous (First Nation, Inuit, Métis) LGBTQIA2S+ Refugees New Immigrants survivors of Human Trafficking Individuals/families fleeing intimate partner violence Single-parent led households Other (specify below)

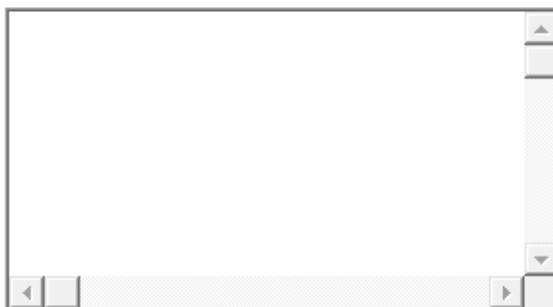
- Other

- What housing does our community need the most? Please select top three (3).

Transitional Housing (temporary housing with supports) Supportive Housing (independent housing with some supports) Community Housing (subsidized/rent-geared-to-income) Rent supplements/subsidies Affordable market-rent units Affordable home ownership Emergency shelter beds Other (specify below)

- Other

- Please share your ideas about how our community can decrease housing insecurity and homelessness?



- Other than housing, what are the top three (3) needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness? i.e.: living rough

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- Other than housing, what are the top three (3) needs of individuals experiencing sheltered homelessness? i.e.: couch surfing

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- How can our community best assist individuals experiencing homelessness in the winter months?

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- Is there anything else you would like to share?

