

Recommendations from Lived Expert Advisory to Address Homelessness

Facilitated discussions were held on the topic of how to better address homelessness at the Lived Expert Advisory Meetings on September 20 and October 18, 2023. In total twenty (20) Lived experts participated in the discussions. Participants included men, women, youth, seniors, persons experiencing issues related to mental health (including substance use), and trained peer support. Some participants were currently housed, some were staying at an emergency shelter, and some were living rough.

A summary of key suggestions is provided below.

1. There needs to be enough safe, affordable housing for everyone who is experiencing homelessness.
2. Community members who are experiencing homelessness need to be able to access spaces, supports and programs that are safe, free from discrimination and stigma. This includes safe places to be indoors at night and during the day during harsh weather.
3. More support for mental health, addictions and other health issues need to be available, accessible and free from discrimination. Quest Community Health Centre and REACH are good examples.
4. Community members experiencing homelessness need to be able to access meaningful activities with their friends, such as library, sports, and places to relax during the day (it is exhausting staying up all night on the street or in a shelter in order to protect yourself) so that they are not perceived to be loitering. Activities must be free and nearby or accessible by bus (with transit passes provided).
5. Community members experiencing homelessness need to have safety and security of their persons and their belongings. Emergency Shelters were identified as unsafe. Community members who are experiencing homelessness want to be engaged more in order to improve safety for themselves and others.

6. Additional support is needed for victims of violence, and more attention is needed to ensure the safety of women, youth, and 2SLGBTQIAA+ people who are at greatest risk of violence. Those victims of violence who end up in the court process need peer support where victim services simply cannot keep up with demand. Trained peers can help set expectations about the court process (including bail) and improve understanding of terminology related to the legal process.
7. There are a few disruptive people who ruin things for everyone. Community members experiencing homelessness can be engaged in order to improve their own safety, downtown safety and reduce damages.
8. Community members experiencing homelessness need to be included meaningfully to be a part of the solution. We are community members. We are not a problem for others to solve.
9. Trained Peer support workers (people who have recovered from homelessness or other life crisis) should be a key part of any solution. Because of their shared experiences peers can build trust and provide hope and direction for others who are currently struggling to find a way forward. Peers should be available to the downtown area as outreach and/or at drop-in spaces that community members experiencing homelessness are using.
10. The public needs to be educated about homelessness, including causes, how it is experienced, and solutions. Education is needed in order to address misunderstanding and stigma. Stigma and prejudice are standing in the way of working together to find solutions.