

# Meaningful Engagement of Lived Experts in Homeless System Transformation: Experiences from Niagara

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# Timeline for Lived Expert Advisory

| 2018      | Launch as advisory subcommittee for Housing First Program   |
|-----------|---|
| 2019      | Changed to advisory for entire Homeless Serving System  |
| 2020-2021 | Began journey mapping. Met virtually during pandemic, provided resources for Lived Experts to meet virtually. |
| 2022      | Resumed in person meetings, created a Living Library, provided peer support training                          |
| 2023      | Created ten recommendations to address homelessness   |

# A Low Barrier Approach

- Co-created mutual expectations for advisory at first meeting
- Those with current or recent experience of homelessness in Niagara welcome
- No “Terms of Reference” and no signature required
- Regular attendance or participation not required
- Members determine their own engagement level based on interest
- Participants are compensated and provided transportation
- Only the advisory chair is expected to attend regularly

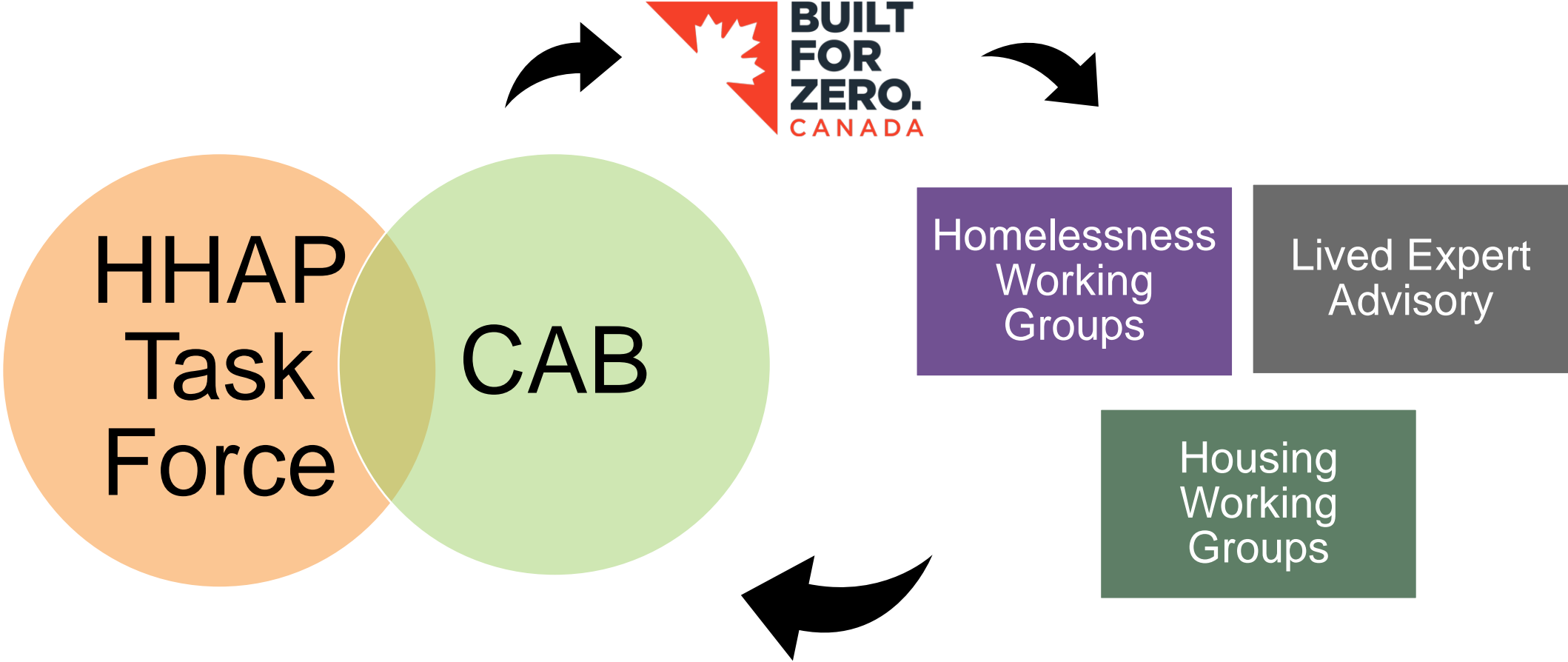
# Mutually Determined Purpose

The Lived Expert Advisory supports the work of Niagara's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) by providing an opportunity for participants in Niagara's Homeless Serving System to share their experience and perspective of homelessness, housing and supports in order to raise awareness, educate, address stigma and inform local policies and practice.

# Commitment to Advisory Members

- **Nothing About Us Without Us**
- Advisory will have a meaningful role
- Sharing stories to address misunderstandings and stigma
- Supporting communication with elected officials and decision-makers
- Providing honoraria for time and contributions
- Recognizing equal value with other working groups and participants
- Providing opportunities for professional development

# Governance and Decision Making



# Advising Regional Initiatives

## Core Advisement

- Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan(HHAP)
- Built for Zero
- Homelessness Services System Transformation
- Homelessness Services Program Areas

## Additional Advisement

- Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- CHAMP Mental Health Pilot

# Value of Lived Expertise

## For Lived Experts

- **Being Heard**
- Feel valued, “I matter”
- Self-confidence
- “I didn’t go through this for nothing”
- Opportunity to help others

## For Service Users

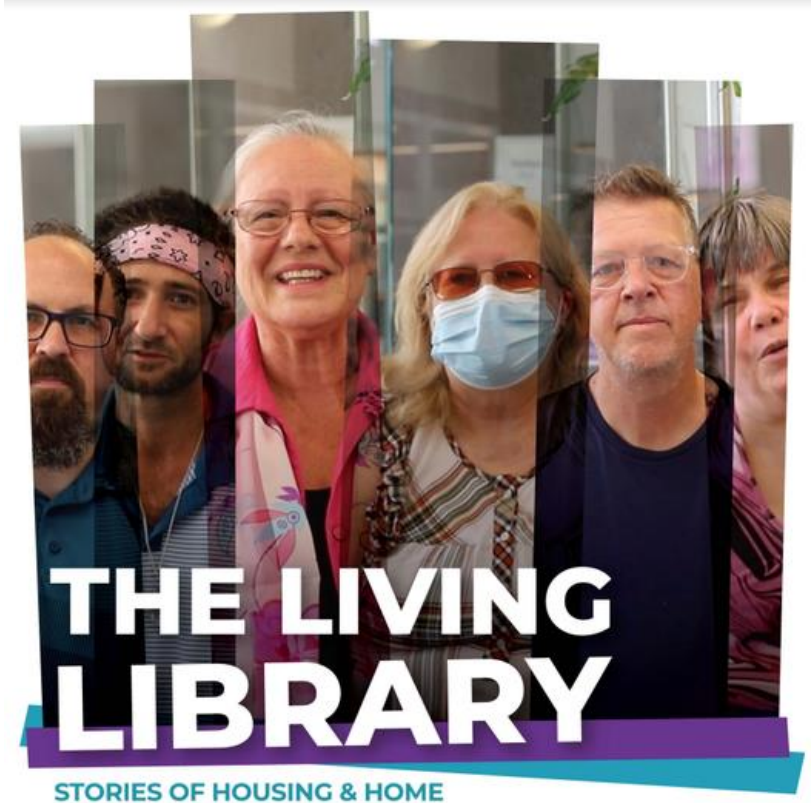
- See and hear Success Stories
- Provides hope
- Having someone in your corner who gets you and has your back



# Journey Mapping

- Journey map began just before the pandemic
- Highlighted a need for cell phone access for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- Insights informed our pandemic response:
  - Assertive Street Outreach team provided cell phones
  - Through partnership with Niagara Falls Library:
    - Provided free outdoor Wi-Fi access while closed to public
    - Made phone chargers available for borrowing

# Stories of Housing and Home



This Living Library collection contains the stories and insights of those who have experienced social housing or homelessness. It also speaks to the effectiveness of peer support and why the voices of lived experience make a difference in the design and delivery of housing services.

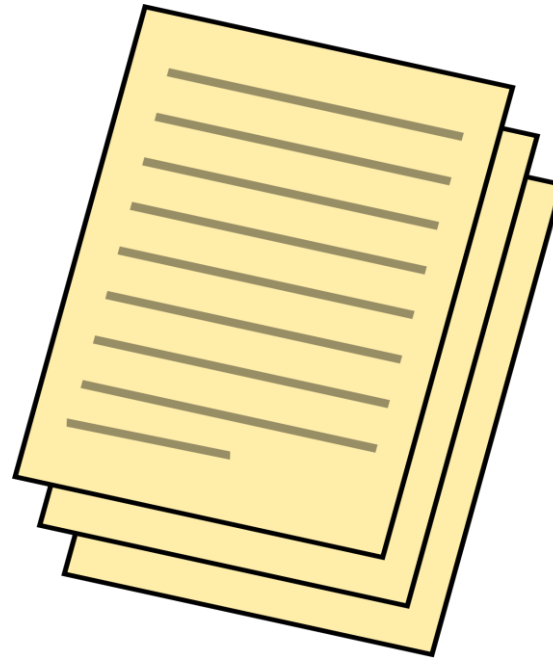
[Visit the Living Library](#)



# Recommendations for Addressing Homelessness

- Facilitated Discussions
- Presented/Provided to:
  - Homeless Services Team
  - Region's Women's Advisory
  - Downtown Community Safety and Wellbeing Committee
  - Reaching Home
  - OMSSA (May 2024)

[Read the Ten Recommendations](#)



# Thank You!