

# Homelessness Vulnerabilities and Potential Mitigating Supports

*Report B: Community Connection and Future Research Session*

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020



## ABOUT THE REPORT

The Kelowna Homelessness Research Collaborative (KHRC) is an interdisciplinary team of investigators across UBC, Okanagan College, and Interior Health interested in conducting research in support of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to start engaging with individuals with lived experience and service providers to gather community specific information about the factors they felt put people most at risk of homelessness and to understand what could be done locally to affect change. The second was to present this information to local groups (service providers, funders, policy makers and those with an interest in the area) to assist in their work and actions going forward.

The Kelowna Homelessness Research Collaborative (KHRC) would like to thank all those who participated in this study.

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Electronic copies of this report are available on our website: [khrc.ok.ubc.ca](http://khrc.ok.ubc.ca)

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## INTRODUCTION

This report documents the outcomes of the third phase of research on homelessness vulnerabilities and potential mitigating supports. Earlier consultations ended with a community call for participants from the research, homelessness service sector, lived experience and local communities to provide input on potential research projects resulting from Phase I and II. Due to the constraints of COVID protocols, the final session was held via online technology utilizing breakout rooms to gather feedback in smaller discussion groups.

The feedback provided during Phase III will also be used during subsequent engagements with Lived Experience groups, community stakeholders, and the research community to identify and prioritize community-based research projects.

For more context on the research that preceded this report, please refer to [Report A](#). It details earlier community engagements in Phase I and Phase II of this project conducted to gain insight into the specific local context of homelessness in the City of Kelowna. In Phase III the focus shifted from gathering information on vulnerability and solutions to identifying potential research projects that could provide additional information and support the sector as it continues to address homelessness in the community.

## THE SESSION

The online research planning session took place on October 20th, 2020, via Zoom. A mixed group of 28 researchers and local service providers participated. It was facilitated by 3 members of the research team and participants gave their input in small online breakout sessions.

## POTENTIAL RESEARCH AREAS / PROJECTS

Many research project ideas emerged from the participants in this session. Suggestions included specific interventions and identified where research could inform local knowledge gaps. The intent of this Phase was not to create a comprehensive list of opportunities for research, rather, the purpose was to bring different groups of people together to discuss the potential for research collaborations and explore additional opportunities that would align with the work they already were doing in their field of interest.

It is not often that community, service providers, and individuals with lived experience of homelessness are able to connect with members of the research community in an informal gathering to exchange ideas. The research team believes that this could be a catalyst for many more conversations to occur in the future.

The following section will be divided into broad categories of research areas identified by participants in this online session. They have been themed from the ideas collected during the

breakout sessions. There is overlap between many of the ideas. For simplicity and clarity, ideas are represented only once.

## Technology Related Research

The following research clusters are loosely related to the access or use of technology to better provide service, access services or minimize the impacts of homelessness.

- **Identification** - Getting and maintaining ID can be difficult. How could technology simplify the storage and retrieval of Identification? What barriers/challenges exist to the use/storage of biometric identification from individuals, organizations, and privacy watchdogs?
- **Data Sharing** - Individuals are often called upon to share their information and stories multiple times when working with different organizations. What are the technological, social and systemic barriers to information sharing? Is it possible to build a technological solution to share data across so many different users, privacy policies, databases and platforms? What are the barriers and challenges to gathering local sector data that can be anonymized and used in further research or system planning? What would be needed to support large scale data collection?
- **Knowledge Sharing/Program and Support Awareness** - There is a large number of supports and agencies/organizations available to provide assistance to individuals. It can be difficult for individuals seeking assistance as well as service providers to know what is available and who is providing services. What barriers and challenges exist to creating, maintaining, and publicizing a centralized repository of services? How do individuals seeking support find the support in an easy to access fashion?
- **Technology Needs of Individuals with Lived and Living Experience of Homelessness** - There is a wide spectrum of knowledge on how to use technology as well as lack of access to technology for individuals with lived or living experience of homelessness. What are the technology needs of this group, both in training (how to use it) and access to technology (cell phone, minutes, access to wifi, computers)? What role does free wifi access points (library, coffee shops) play in meeting the needs of individuals who are homeless? How aware of these free access points are they? Are there barriers to accessing them?

## Stigma Related Research

A great deal of discussion focused on topics related to stigma, including the effects of stigma on individuals, city planning, and community conversations.

- **Creating Awareness** - Concerns were raised about the level of misinformation and lack of knowledge around the factors contributing to homelessness. Can illustrations or the stories of individuals be used to educate or inform communities about the realities of homelessness? What are the current perceptions of the local community regarding the causes of homelessness? Can collaborative community research projects change perceptions regarding homelessness?

- **Stigmatization** - How might social serving agencies and systems stigmatize individuals in unintended ways (i.e. names of programs or services, names for individuals accessing services, categorizations)? In what ways do individuals experiencing homelessness self-stigmatize? Why and what impact does this have on their ability to access services and address their needs? To what extent do programs or services act to control or influence the behaviour of individuals trying to access service?
- **Role of Allyship** - In the local area, who are allies for homeless advocacy? What motivates individuals to become active allies? What individual characteristics, attitudes or attributes positively impact collaboration between allies and those with lived experience? What acts of allyship are currently happening in the local community?

## Local Knowledge Gaps

Participants identified gaps in knowledge related to local issues, and discussed how additional information could influence social policy or programming in the region.

### *Impact of Criminal Justice on Homelessness*

A history of involvement in the criminal justice system was highlighted as a contributing or causal factor impacting homelessness locally. The following cluster of research areas are addressing the need to better understand the impact of the criminal justice system on homelessness.

- **Issues upon Release** - What are the challenges locally that exist for individuals exiting the criminal justice system? Are there differences between genders? Are there connections between a history of incarceration or criminality, and risk of homelessness in the local context? What are the experiences of individuals locally when they leave the criminal justice system?

### *Food Insecurity*

Participants identified opportunities for research into local solutions for food insecurity in the region.

- **Connecting Supply to Demand** - What are creative or innovative ways to connect local sources of excess food production to those who could use that food? How can food waste that is still consumable be redirected to shelters, food banks, or others facing food insecurity? What are the current barriers to a system connecting excess food supply to local demand? Are there ways to extend the shelf life of produce locally to enable better distribution to those in need?

### *Housing Solutions*

Participants indicated that there is a lack of local knowledge about the successes or failures in local housing solutions.

- **Housing Solutions** - What is the range of housing solutions being employed in the local area currently? What current local solutions are working best for individuals? Do some

housing solutions work better for certain individuals (case studies)? What has been the impact of housing solutions on specific parts of the local community?

- **Community Stigma and Supportive Housing** - Not all neighbourhoods have the same reaction to supportive housing in their area. What concerns are common to all neighbourhoods, and which are unique to some? What factors mitigate community concerns about supportive housing units? Can interactive/collaborative events aimed at bringing different perspectives together change perceptions and reduce stigma?
- **Allocation of Supportive Housing** - Do the activities currently undertaken prior to announcing supportive housing buildings contribute to negative community reactions?
- **Scattered Housing** - Under what conditions have scattered site housing been successful and what factors have led to its failure?

### ***Community Contributions***

Many groups and individuals are contributing to address homelessness in the local community. The scope and range of the contributions are not fully known.

- **Volunteerism** - What is the scope of volunteer opportunities that contribute to addressing aspects of homelessness? What opportunities to volunteer do people believe exist? How do community members learn about and engage in volunteer activity in the area of homelessness? How does volunteerism impact the issues of homelessness?

### ***Migration Patterns***

The cost of housing in Kelowna has been steadily growing and the percentage of people moving here to live and work is increasing as well. With an extremely low vacancy rate, it is realistic to assume that not everyone who moves here will find a place to rent or purchase that is within their financial ability to sustain.

- **Migration and Homelessness** - What are the migration patterns from other provinces and regions to Kelowna/Okanagan? Why are they moving? What are the socio-graphics and demographics of individuals moving to the region? What role does migration play in the local housing crisis? What supports are available to individuals moving to the region that assist in securing housing?

### **Systems and System Changes**

The role of systems in mitigating or enhancing the negative impacts on individuals lives was discussed by participants.

- **Systemic Barriers** - What barriers to accessing local services exist for individuals trying to gain service? What barriers exist for local service providers to give service to individuals needing support? What can the sector tell us about what is working/not working in the system?
- **Generational Impact** - What are the intergenerational impacts of poverty and the use of social services? Is there a different perspective on the use of social services and income assistance programs between individuals who have had recent involvement with the

services versus those who have not? Are individuals who have a family history of engagement with social services viewed differently from those who do not? Does this history affect the ability to access or maintain services? Who are doors more likely to open or close for?

- **Governance** - In what ways are the politics around topics like harm reduction, safe injection, stigma, etc. influencing local policy development? How are policies translated into actual 'impact' or action? What does that impact look like?
- **Reconciliation/Decolonization** - In what ways are local systems engaging in reconciliation? Decolonization? How do local governments and agencies include the voice and perspective of Indigenous peoples? How are the concepts of decolonization being addressed in our system, our organizations or sector? Who can do this work? What are effective decolonization activities versus those that are seen as tokenism? Who is involved with determining research questions and methods that work? How are the voices of First Nations and Indigenous peoples being included in system discussion? How do First Nations/Indigenous peoples connect into the research? How can researchers better collaborate with First Nations/Indigenous peoples? How might trauma therapies be designed or implemented to acknowledge and avoid the harm of colonization and oppression?
- **Accessibility of Services** - How can services be made more accessible? Do individuals using local services believe that they are accessible? If so, in what ways? What role does transportation play in the perceived/real use/accessibility of services locally? What services are available locally and who are they for? What is the impact of performatism on an individual's ability to access services (use of VAT, control point access)?
- **Voice of Lived Experience** - How can (or is) the voice of lived experience being used in the development/evaluation of existing programs and services? How is (can) the voice of lived experience be used to guide policy development locally or provincially?
- **Alternative Service Models/Collaboration** - What could be the impact of a Service Hub for adults similar to the Foundry for Youth? What are the barriers to coordinated efforts/collaboration between resources that offer similar services? Is there really duplication of services locally and how much duplication is too much? What innovations in service delivery could be made to become individual-centered? What are alternatives or similar models to community hubs (mobile intake, hubs that move, one-stop-shop) that can help determine what needs you have and how to address it, as well as identify a safe place to get 'triaged'? What is preventing a one-stop-shop Service Hub from happening? How does a one-stop-shop successfully include both low and high barrier service (i.e. serve those who are using and not, serve families and individuals, serve those fleeing violence, serve youth)? What successes are local models for alternative delivery having (i.e. The Foundry)?
- **Social Policy Development** - What is more effective in the local community: gate-keeper systems of funding or guaranteed basic income styles of funding for individuals? How can information from the front lines actually impact policy, funding, interventions, and program designs at a local or provincial level? How does the federal and provincial poverty reduction policies impact the local community, how does it translate to local actions? What can the sector/service providers tell us about how policy or programming is working/not working

(getting the voice of front line or organizations)? How do we mobilize the knowledge/learning from service users and direct service providers?

- **Funding/Funders** - What questions do service organizations wish they could ask funders? What are the barriers to engaging funders in difficult conversations? Are there different policy tools that help prioritize funding (i.e. gaming funds)? What are the historical/neoliberal influences that are driving the funding agenda (foundations, grants, government funding)?
- **Service Provision** - Using local examples, what are the long-term impacts of local programming (case studies)? How could the system (and policy) work to support individuals who choose to remain unhoused? What does living in unhoused ways look like and what can be done to facilitate an acceptable quality of life?
- **Social Impact** - What are appropriate and alternative methods to measure the 'impact' of programs that don't solely rely on financial statistics?
- **Prevention/Intervention** - How could the system intervene/identify that people are at risk? How does the "system" know that someone is at risk? How can the system better (or at all) connect warning signs related to the same individual?

## Community Connection to Research

The connection between the community and researchers was discussed. Participants felt that the community did not know how to take advantage of researchers or the knowledge generated by research, and was uncertain how to get engaged in research itself.

- **Collaboration with the Community** - What are the barriers to including/collaborating with individuals who are not affiliated with an institution in order to do research? What are some presumptions behind involving individuals who are not affiliated with an institution? What role could a community Research Hub have on homelessness research locally?
- **Knowledge Mobilization** - What are the barriers to accessing research (for organizations / individuals not affiliated with institutions)? What are effective ways of mobilizing knowledge from research generated locally? What approaches could work better to avoid the impact of "fake news"? How do we bring research done "on" lived experience back to people with lived experience? How can unfiltered information from frontline workers influence the policy makers?
- **Educating Researchers** - How can we educate researchers on "better ways to do research"? How can more participatory or community engaged research become the "norm" in Kelowna (local)?

## CONCLUSION

Inviting the community, service providers, individuals with lived experience and researchers together created a unique opportunity to discuss how research can and should play a role in addressing the issue of homelessness in the community. While just the beginning of conversations with the community, this first foray into connecting different worlds demonstrated that breaking

down barriers can result in the generation of ideas that have the potential to create a great deal of change.

This project was an important community experiment. It demonstrated that the research process and distribution of results can be made accessible to a diverse range of individuals in a wide variety of ways. It showed that individuals from the community, service providers, students and researchers can connect in authentic ways to create meaningful contributions to research.

The work from this project does not stop here. It will continue on in future research done through the Kelowna Homelessness Research Collaborative (KHRC). The connections made between the community, service providers and researchers will inevitably spawn new collaborations and ideas. The information gathered from this project will be shared in the community through reports, websites, and newsletters. The research will also be presented at a future KHRC research symposium in 2021.

Thank you to all who participated in any Phase of this research project. Your contributions have been noted. They will serve as inspiration to future rounds of research.