FINDING OUR WAY HOME:

Indigenous Homelessness in Surrey Executive Summary

SURREY URBAN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 2022

Acknowledgements

Our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish, including the Semiahmoo First Nation, the Kwantlen First Nation, the Katzie First Nation, the Kwikwetlem First Nation, the Qayqayt First Nation and the Tsawwassen First Nation. We recognize their connection to this land and acknowledge that we are newcomers to Surrey like everyone else. Our group, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee, does not represent these land-based First Nations, and we are careful not to speak on their behalf. Instead, we represent urban Indigenous people that have moved here from all over BC and, in fact, from all over Canada to make Surrey their home. Our focus is on making Surrey a great place for Indigenous people living in the city, regardless of where they come from, their legal status, or their particular cultural heritage. As we do this, we endeavour to live in a good way with the land-based First Nations that have called this land their home since time immemorial.

MESSAGE FROM SUILC

Call to Action

At least 635 Indigenous individuals are estimated to have experienced homelessness in Surrey as of 2020, a rate of 1 in 26 Indigenous people living in Surrey compared to 1 in 239 non-Indigenous people.

With a rental vacancy rate of 0.6% as of 2021 and a BC Housing waitlist of 2,554 as of 2019, Surrey simply does not have the affordable housing supply to address the needs of those experiencing homelessness. Compounding this, Surrey has a deficit of Indigenous housing options. Despite similar urban Indigenous populations, Surrey had less than one-fifth the number of Indigenous housing units as Vancouver.

There is an urgent need to act. More deeply affordable non-market units – led by and in collaboration with Indigenous organizations – are needed to create exit pathways for those experiencing homelessness. Without more housing options, more Indigenous people will be put at risk of homelessness. And without exit pathways, those currently homeless will face more severe and long-term erosion in their health, social connections, and trust in the systems that are meant to provide assistance.

Priority Recommendations:

- **Priority #1:** Immediate coordinated action is needed by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments to create deeply affordable housing, with and without supports, in Surrey to offer an exit strategy for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and to prevent individuals and households from falling into homelessness. Housing is needed for single Indigenous men and women, and low-income families in crisis, especially single-parent families.
- **Priority #2:** Create and implement a strategy to increase local Indigenous capacity to develop affordable housing in Surrey.

Other Recommendations

- Distribute the Finding Our Way Home results to all stakeholders working on Indigenous housing and social services in Surrey.
- Include FRAFCA at the Coordinated Access System (CAS) table to strengthen access to services for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, especially those who are unsheltered.
- Advocate for increases to Income Assistance and Disability Assistance to provide Indigenous people who are not able to work with more income for housing and increase the financial viability of operating deeply affordable housing.
- Advocate for the implementation of the right to housing at the federal level and the implementation of UNDRIP at the provincial level, including the right of Indigenous peoples to housing.

INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

The Finding Our Way Home project is an initiative of Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) to examine the following questions within the Surrey context:

- Who are the Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Surrey and what are their stories?
- What are the pathways of Indigenous people into homelessness in Surrey?

- What services and supports exist in the community to assist Indigenous people experiencing homelessness?
- How might services and supports be improved to reduce then eliminate Indigenous homelessness in Surrey?

This document summarizes the key findings of this work. It has three accompanying documents:

- A **Research Report on Indigenous Homelessness in Canada** that was completed to document the current state of knowledge around the causal factors for Indigenous homelessness, as well as best practices for reducing and eliminating Indigenous homelessness.
- A **What We Heard Report** that documents the results of an extensive engagement in May to August 2022, including interviews with 27 Indigenous people with lived and living experience of homelessness, 12 interviews with organizations that serve Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, and a workshop with 17 SUILC Guide Group members (see call out box).
- A **Data Summary** that documents the available demographic information on Indigenous homelessness in Surrey from the 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver, as well as Indigenous shelter use data from BC Housing and the City of Surrey.

SUILC Guide Groups

The Skookum Surrey Guide Groups were created as a prototype during Skookum Lab's Indigenous Social Innovation Lab and have been foundational in ensuring that there is a broad range of perspectives on the experience of urban Indigenous peoples in Surrey. The Guide Groups create a safe space for participants to come together, share their stories, create supportive and resilient relationships grounded in culture and Indigeneity, and assist us in centering Indigenous wisdom and lived experiences. The Guide Groups include Elders, Caregivers, and Youth.

Defining Indigenous Homelessness

"To be Indigenous of the land and to be homeless does not make sense. How can that be?"

– Guide Group member

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among those who experience homelessness in almost all urban centres within Canada. In response to the unique factors that create the conditions for Indigenous homelessness, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, in work led by researcher and writer Jesse Thistle, and in collaboration with Indigenous scholars, community members, knowledge keepers and elders, developed a definition of Indigenous homelessness.

Indigenous homelessness is a human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, and appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include individuals, families, and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally, or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).

A Note on Language

Words to describe the experience of not having shelter are extremely varied and have evolved over time. Homelessness continues to be the most commonly used word to describe the experience and is generally recognized and understood across communities. In recent times, community advocates have called attention to how stigmatizing language around homelessness can be. For example, The Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness in Victoria created an anti-stigma poster that calls attention to harmful words such as "street-entrenched or involved", "chronically homeless", or "hard-to-house" that can be dehumanizing and person-blaming. See **https://acehsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/stigma-poster.pdf** for more information.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Indigenous Experience of Homelessness in Surrey

Based on data from the 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver (PiT Count), Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in Surrey were over-represented among those experiencing homelessness:

141 Indigenous people were identified as experiencing homelessness in Surrey through the 2020 Point-in-Time Count (PiT Count), representing 31% of all homeless people counted in Surrey. Indigenous people make up 2.6% of all Surrey residents (as of 2016). An additional 494 Indigenous individuals are estimated to have been hidden homeless during the PiT Count period, meaning they may be couch surfing or living in cars. This means a total of 635 Indigenous individuals are estimated to have been homeless in Surrey in 2020.

Data also showed that compared to non-Indigenous PiT Count respondents, Indigenous respondents were more likely to…

- **Be unsheltered.** 50% of Indigenous respondents to the PiT Count reported being unsheltered, compared to 27% of non-Indigenous respondents.
- **Be younger.** Age data for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness shows more younger and fewer older people than among non-Indigenous people. This is reflected in both the PiT Count data (13% Indigenous under 25 years vs. 5% non-Indigenous and 14% Indigenous over 55 vs. 29% non-Indigenous) and the shelter use data (9% Indigenous under 25 years vs. 7% non-Indigenous and 9% Indigenous over 55 vs. 26% non-Indigenous).
- **Be women.** 42% of Indigenous respondents to the PiT Homeless Count were women, compared to 28% of non-Indigenous respondents.
- **Identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.** According to the PiT Count, Indigenous people experiencing homelessness are more likely to identify as 2SLGBTQ2+ (17%) than non-Indigenous individuals (7%).

- **Be living with a learning disability or cognitive impairment.** 76% of Indigenous respondents to the PiT Count reported this, compared to 60% of non-Indigenous respondents.
- **Be living with addiction.** 54% of Indigenous respondents to the PiT Count reported this, compared to 44% of non-Indigenous respondents.
- **Have an acquired brain injury.** 38% of Indigenous respondents reported this, compared to 26% of non-Indigenous respondents.
- **First experience homelessness before they are 19 years of age.** 35% of Indigenous respondents to the PiT Count reported experiencing homelessness for the first time before they were 19, compared to 23% of non-Indigenous respondents.

Interviews with Indigenous people with lived experience of homelessness in Surrey reflected several common themes:

- Most respondents had weak ties or no ties to their home communities
- Most participants had complex trauma and experience intergenerational trauma
- Most expressed a desire to reconnect with their culture
- Most faced some sort of physical or mental disability that interfered with their ability to earn a living
- Most perceived increasing unaffordability and low rates of income assistance as the greatest barriers to housing
- Most had experienced some sort of racial housing discrimination
- Most had negative housing experiences

Existing Service Providers

Through the interviews with Indigenous people with current and past lived experience of homelessness and the Guide Group workshop, the following housing and service providers were identified as offering key resources to Indigenous people experiencing or at risk of homelessness:

- Atira Women's Resource Society
- Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA)
- Kekinow Native Housing Society
- Options Community Services
- School District 36 Indigenous support workers
- Surrey Urban Mission (including their Olive Branch Shelter)
- Together We Can Drug & Alcohol Recovery & Education Society
- Lookout Housing and Health Society

Indigenous Youth Homelessness

Young Indigenous people are more likely to experience foster care and homelessness in their teens, yet research on youth homelessness in general, and Indigenous youth homelessness in particular, is extremely limited.

Youth homelessness is not well-captured by typical Point-in-Time counts. There is also limited data on Indigenous youth homelessness and foster care, making service and policy interventions more difficult to identify.

ERNIE'S STORY:
A HUNGER FOR HEALING

Ernie was born in Alberta and moved to Surrey when he was a child. Now a young adult, Ernie is a survivor of complex trauma. He moved to Surrey with his mom when she separated from his father. Ernie recalls that both his parents were challenged by alcoholism and as a result his Auntie helped raise him. His father was unable to parent after the family experienced collective trauma and his sister was in an accident that resulted in head trauma and four broken bones. His sister was also severely injured and never fully recovered; she became disabled and non-verbal. Ernie shares that since he has never received any grief support, he only feels numbness, and says this has resulted in a great deal of anger, violence and substance use for him. He discloses that he became addicted to methamphetamines before his teenage years.

Ernie doesn't have any connection with any Indigenous community. He says since the accident he has felt abandoned with no connection to his Indigenous family or community aside from his Aunt. He shares that he is trying to reconnect with his culture and spirituality through ceremony. Ernie has struggled with homelessness four times in the past year and is "hungry for [his] life back". Ernie says he is receiving good support at a coed recovery home for Indigenous folks, his housing is stable but that it is not a 'forever home'. He's worried that if he relapses, he will lose his housing. He seems pleased to be housed somewhere Indigenous and culture-based but says, "I don't have a home, I am comfortable, and I enjoy the company, but a home is where you plant roots and plan a future – this is not a home for me".

Ernie has been fortunate enough to have an Auntie who is an outreach worker, and she has guided him to resources like the 211 number, Options and FRAFCA. Ernie says his greatest needs are education, greater access to information, and financial stability. He would love it if he had a stable house in Surrey with ongoing support and the opportunity to live close to his family.

Ernie's story is one of 27 experiences collected through this project. See the What We Heard Report for more information and insight into the lived experiences of Indigenous people facing homelessness in Surrey.

CAUSES AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Pathways into homelessness are complex and layered. The factors below reflect the many pathways into homelessness identified by Indigenous people with lived experience of homelessness, the Guide Group discussion, and research on Indigenous homelessness. Engagement participants noted that people are often experiencing multiple issues at once and lose housing because they lack access to resources to help them.

- **Economic and societal structural factors,** such as poverty; lack of employment opportunities; lack of credentials; lack of access to education, employment, and childcare; ongoing and emerging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on services, poverty, and social connections.
- **Direct and intergenerational trauma,** including individual or family experience of residential schools.
- **Racial and cultural discrimination** in housing and employment.
- **Over-representation of Indigenous people in the child welfare and criminal justice systems,** including the experience of foster care, being separated from family, and aging out of care.
- **Disconnection from community, culture, and language** and resulting loss of sense of purpose, hope, and self-worth.
- **Impacts of colonial systems that create and maintain cycles of Indigenous poverty,** including the Indian Act and the reserve system, the lack of housing in reserve communities, and the lack of clear avenues for support for urban Indigenous populations.
- **Impact of displacement and migration,** including the impact on communities of displacement from lands, environmental crises (e.g., wildfire) and manipulation (e.g., large energy projects), inadequate housing and services in reserve communities, migration between reserve and urban communities.
- **Violence and escaping harm,** including domestic violence.
- **Personal factors,** such as mental or physical health challenges without adequate supports, difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, substance use and addiction.
- **Lack of affordable housing,** including the very high cost of market housing in Metro Vancouver and the historic disinvestment in affordable housing by provincial and federal governments.
- **Loss of housing** through evictions, renovictions, and redevelopment.
- **A fractured service landscape and the failure of non-Indigenous approaches** to create exit pathways and healing for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

AGNES'S STORY:
AN INSTINCT FOR SELF-PRESERVATION AND A DRIVE FOR A GOOD LIFE

Agnes, a mother of four, moved to Surrey from Treaty 4 Territory after fleeing an abusive relationship. Since being in Surrey, Agnes has struggled to find resources that can help her situation. Agnes is familiar with the system and tells us she used to be the person helping others, now she is in the position where she needs help. Agnes says she was adopted and grew up in a well-to-do family and describes herself as "too white for the brown and too brown for the white".

Although Agnes is currently housed, she is at immediate risk of becoming homeless again as she describes being bullied and discriminated against by her current landlord. If she doesn't find a solution, Agnes anticipates needing access to a shelter within the month. She has faced challenge after challenge retaining housing. She describes being discriminated against for being Indigenous, turned down from shelter access, and having to settle for housing that is inappropriate for her children. Agnes says she found some support from local organizations, but also had a negative experience with an abusive staff member. She knows resources are available, but she thinks there are too few available for Indigenous folks despite those being the resources most needed. Agnes is worried about her children, they have no extended family, are precariously housed, and Agnes herself has not been able to deal with the PTSD she has from the violence she's faced because she's been too busy trying keep her family afloat.

As a result of her difficulty in accessing the resources she has needed, Agnes can see the gaps clearly. She sees a great need for housing resources that have a more interactive Indigenous community-building model. She would love to be linked up with other Indigenous folks facing similar challenges. She also sees a great need for more life skills programs for Indigenous folks. Agnes says that the skills people learn in on-reserve communities do not translate into urban life. Agnes also sees a need for a more networked, streamlined, and goal-oriented approach to helping clients. She says she doesn't want to just see a file on people, rather, there should be an end goal for each client, not just a one-off emergency response approach.

BARRIERS IN HOUSING AND SERVICES

Engagement with people with lived and living experience of homelessness, as well as service providers, identified numerous service gaps and barriers. Participants gave consistent feedback that their experience with services reflected a lack of resources and a lack of supports that address the needs of Indigenous people. The following were key issues identified:

- **Inadequate financial resources,** including very low-Income Assistance and Disability Assistance rates.
- **Gaps in service delivery,** including difficulty determining which service providers exist and who can help, long wait-times to access services, few or overwhelmed Indigenous services in Surrey.
- **Lack of awareness of services and how to access them,** including by both people seeking services and lack of appropriate referrals by service providers.
- **Lack of capacity and coordination among service providers,** including under-staffing, high turnover, lack of Indigenous representation among staff.
- **Gaps in services,** including long wait-times for housing; lack of one-on-one support and advocacy for those with complex needs; lack of supports for Elders, Indigenous mothers, people transitioning from incarceration.
- **Eligibility requirements and gatekeepers to access services,** such as requiring income taxes to be completed, requiring enrollment in specialized programming, participating in invasive intake processes, lack of transparency for what services are available and how to access them.
- **Systemic racism in housing systems that punishes Indigenous households for not aligning with non-Indigenous values,** including strict eligibility criteria that pushes people out with nowhere to go, rules against family and friends visiting or moving in, lack of flexibility around late rent.
- **Personal barriers worsened by a lack of support systems,** such as mental health, substance use and addiction, concurrent disorders.
- **Stigma and distrust in accessing social services,** including traumatic past experience with service providers, stigma and shame experienced in accessing social services, experiencing judgement for accessing subsidies and income supports.
- **Lack of training among service provider staff,** including trauma-informed practice, cultural safety; lack of understanding among non-Indigenous staff of what Indigenous people need.
- **Lack of access to transportation;** training for police to respond with care during wellness checks.
- **Lack of early intervention supports for struggling families,** for example, support from Ministry of Children and Family Development only available once children are already in care.
- **No avenue to address racism in private market,** including discrimination by landlords in housing search or in evictions, racism by neighbours.

ANDREA'S STORY:
A REQUEST FOR BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS

Andrea shares that she is from the region, is Coast Salish and her journey of substance use is what brought her to Surrey. Technically she is connected to on-reserve income assistance, but she does not make it there often. Her experience with shelters is that they are often full, or that there are bed bugs, scabies, and lice so she chooses to sleep outdoors. Andrea has been homeless for over 5 years, sometimes stays with friends and has been forced into survival sex for accommodation. Andrea shares that she has felt discriminated against and that "It was a rude awakening searching for housing, overwhelming, and people had no understanding for someone in my situation".

The hardest part about living outdoors is the relentless judgement based on her appearance, she shares that today is good day today because she had showered recently. Andrea describes the support of outreach services including FRAFCA and Night Shift as helpful with the provision of food, clothing, and harm reduction equipment but shares that more services for mental health are needed. Not having a phone number, address or a job makes seeking services and housing challenging, as does her substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder. Andrea is unaware of any shelters or services that are designed for Indigenous people other than FRAFCA.

Andrea also shares that she has received more than one loss of service, or a ban from shelters and that in her frustration her temper got the best of her. Andrea wanted it known that it is nearly impossible to heal in that kind of an environment (shelter). Andrea wishes that she had a bed, running water and a door that locks, her greatest need is a willingness to want to become sober and wishes she had something to look forward to.

"We should all at least be a lot more unjudgmental to an addict, we don't get high because we want to, it's a coping method and that the only way we know how to make the pain stop".

PROMISING PRACTICES

This section identifies promising practices for **preventing homelessness, responding to homelessness,** and **supporting Indigenous individuals and families in exiting homelessness.**

Indigenous homelessness is complex and rooted in the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism, intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, and discrimination. Many of those experiencing homelessness are also experiencing a profound disconnection from their community, family, and culture. The impact of these factors includes poor mental health, stigma, high rates of substance use, and distrust of government and other institutions..

It must be noted that addressing homelessness requires an adequate supply of affordable housing and sufficient income to maintain housing and other costs of living. Homelessness is complex and many individuals and families will require additional supports, especially health supports, to access and maintain their housing. However, the affordable housing crisis facing Surrey and other communities in Metro Vancouver and BC creates a significant barrier to entering stable housing that undermines other efforts to address homelessness. Housing availability is limited, rents are expensive, and those at the bottom of the economic ladder are vulnerable to economic shocks such as an illness or loss of job.

Practices for Preventing Homelessness

Practices for preventing homelessness focus on eliminating the conditions that create poverty and housing precarity for Indigenous individuals and families. This includes:

- Using a human rights-based approach to provide low-barrier access to housing and supports
- Improving and streamlining organizational partnerships to connect those who require services to the right provider
- Improving Indigenous governance and coordination in housing and social services, through more Indigenous-led organizations and more Indigenous representations at other organizations

- Increasing Indigenous staffing in organizations that serve Indigenous homeless individuals and families at all scales
- Providing adequate and equitable funding that is long-term is required so that organizations can offer comprehensive and reliable service provision and staffing
- Promoting pathways to cultural reconnection
- Subsidizing childcare for Indigenous families
- Incentivizing and enabling affordable housing development to increase the supply of affordable housing

A human rights-based approach to housing means that governments are obligated to create the conditions where everyone has access to housing. It is rooted in international human rights frameworks, and supported by federal legislation. In its use in Canada, it means that the government is required to use legislation, policy, and programs towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

*The right to housing is recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It is further enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that states: "**Indigenous Peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health, and social security.**" The Government of BC has affirmed the application of UNDRIP in BC through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.*

Practices for Responding to Indigenous Homelessness

Practices for responding to homelessness focus on meeting immediate needs through transitioning youth in care, shelters, warming centres, harm reduction supplies, meal programs, rental supplements support with navigating landlord disputes, evictions and other services. These types of services can help meet people where they are at but cannot alone address Indigenous homelessness. That being said, shelters and other services that respond to immediate needs can better support Indigenous people experiencing homelessness by

- Offering culturally safe and appropriate services with a wraparound approach, meaning a team-based and collaborative approach to individual case management so that individuals do not need to engaged with multiple and separate service providers to meet their needs
- Promoting cultural reconnection
- Applying a human-rights based approach
- Integrating Indigenous values and practices into service delivery

Practices for Supporting Exits from Homelessness

Housing First is the most established model for supporting those experiencing chronic homelessness in accessing and maintaining long-term housing with support. This model has been shown to be effective in reducing chronic and episodic homelessness while also reducing the use of emergency services and shelters. The principles of *Indigenous Housing First* include the following:

- Rapid housing with supports
- Offering clients' choice in housing
- Separating housing provision from other services (i.e. access to housing is not contingent on treatment or enrollment in programs)
- Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Integrating housing into the community
- Strengths-based and promoting self-sufficiency
- Allowing flexibility for extended family and communal living

Indigenous Peoples exiting homelessness also require supportive services that are culturally safe and appropriate and that provide opportunities for cultural reconnection.

While Housing First is a model with significant support across the sector, it is extremely difficult to implement in the context of high housing costs and a lack of funding for both creating more housing options and providing services through this model.

Solutions Identified Through Engagement

Indigenous people in Surrey with lived and living experience of homelessness reported that they want to see support services provided with more dignity and care.

People with lived and living experience of homelessness told us that the process for accessing services can often be degrading and invasive.

They identified the following potential solutions:

- Strengthen family support services
- Create a more collective housing model that promotes interaction and mutual support between residents
- Offer more supports for youth
- Create more wraparound services
- Offer more opportunities for gaining life skills, education, and job training
- Create more safe spaces for substance use recovery

Guide Group members identified a number of potential solutions that go beyond housing. The list below reflects how community members see the connection between housing, income, supports, and culture. It also reflects a need for an explicitly anti-racist approach to housing for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

- First Nations land trust in Surrey to give Indigenous people an opportunity to buy into equity
- Guaranteed income
- Training and employment opportunities
- Residential tenancy rights focused on Indigenous people that include cultural supports
- More outreach support for housing
- Indigenous renters' directory where landlords can list properties

- Website where Indigenous people can access supports and find advocates in Surrey
- Indigenous shelters and resources
- "Lots and lots" of 24/7 services dedicated to housing Indigenous people
- More wraparound services
- Treatment centres for families
- Rent-to-own opportunities
- Lower cost housing
- Program where Elders don't have to pay for food
- Access to garden for growing food

Service providers within Surrey and in other communities reported the following key factors in enabling Indigenous people to better access services.

- Cultural supports
- Communication about available services
- Trust and care in service provision
- Early and ongoing intervention for people who require supports to maintain housing
- Creating sense of hope
- Offering additional supports as needed, such as baby food, transportation, clothing, etc.

- Support services that take into account the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person's wellbeing
- Low barrier supports complemented with wraparound services
- Indigenous-led approaches that focus on systems-level change

Opportunities to Improve Current Service Provision

Interviews with service providers identified the follow significant barriers to addressing Indigenous homelessness through the housing and social service sectors:

- **Increased staffing.** This was identified as one of the main challenges to operating culturally supportive housing. As the sector has grown, the availability of trained Indigenous housing workers has not kept pace. It is difficult to find an Indigenous support worker or housing manager. More training and higher pay is needed to attract and retain workers in this sector. If the lack of training opportunities and low pay is not addressed, approaches will continue replicating conventional models that we know are not working.
- **More long-term funding** of housing projects is needed. Governments have increased funding since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic which has spurred many new projects. However, a lot of this funding is temporary, and organizations fear the funding will dry up.
- **More coordination and partnerships.** Collaborating across organizations was identified as a key area of improvement across research and engagement, particularly in response to the perception by individuals accessing services that the service sector is fractured and difficult to navigate. Coordinated Access and Allocation Table was identified as an important model for identifying individuals in need.
- **Training for staff.** Engagement identified a need for greater cultural safety and trauma-informed practice training among service provider staff.

Coordinated Access System (CAS)

CAS is a community-wide system that aims to provide services to those experiencing homelessness in a coordinated way to reduce barriers to access and make it easier to find supports and housing to exit homelessness.

While Surrey uses CAS, a key partner, FRAFCA, is not at table because they do not directly provide housing. The Finding Our Way Project revealed that FRAFCA provides key outreach services to Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, including those who are unsheltered. It is the recommendation of this report that FRAFCA be included in the CAS to better serve Indigenous people experiencing homelessness.

CONCLUSION

The legacy of colonialism and racist policies such as residential schools have created conditions of poverty and social and cultural disconnection for many Indigenous individuals. These conditions increase an individual's vulnerability to homelessness. This is reflected across Canada broadly and Surrey specifically.

There are best practices and solutions that can be implemented, drawing on the many efforts and innovations of Indigenous communities and organizations across the country. However, the capacity among local service providers is low and resources are spread thin. More investment and care is needed to create response strategies that are rooted in Indigenous processes and worldviews, and that provide a continuum of care for people at whatever stage of the journey they are in.

More deeply affordable housing, especially Indigenous-led housing, is needed to prevent homelessness and offer exit pathways for those experiencing homelessness.

Immediate response strategies that are culturally safe, that build cultural connections and self-confidence, and that meet people where they are at are also needed in the form of shelters and other emergency services. However, shelters alone are not enough to stop the growing homelessness crisis in Metro Vancouver and BC. They are only a first step and should be connected with long-term housing solutions.