

City of Vancouver
Poverty Reduction Plan
What We Heard: Phase 1

March 2019

Acknowledgements

The City acknowledges that we have listened, learned and heard on the unceded Homelands of the xʷməθkʷəṽəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwətaʔt / sə́lilwítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) nations.

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Thank you to Kevin Barlow, Rocky James and the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) for strength-based, cultural leadership, and for continuing to challenge us to integrate deeper practices of truth and reconciliation that is integral to achieving prosperity for all.

Thank you to Stephanie Allen and Alice Kendall for their leadership in elevating concerns of ongoing harmful practice and speaking to the need for the City to use trauma-informed approaches for those who currently experience intersections of poverty and racialized and gendered violence in Vancouver.

Thank you to Lyana Patrick and Jeremy Stone for thoughtful listening, intentional recording, and careful analysis of what we heard from the 15 engagement sessions.

Context

The City has been working with key partners on developing and implementing various initiatives over the past five years to improve the quality of life for all residents including: the Healthy City Strategy and interconnected initiatives like the Housing Vancouver Strategy, Creative City, Greenest City, Community Economic Development Strategy, Food Strategy, Social Infrastructure Plan, VanPlay, Resilient City, and local area plans across Vancouver.

In June 2017, City Council approved a motion to create a Poverty Reduction Plan for Vancouver as part of the Healthy City Strategy (HCS) 2014-2018 Action Plan. The poverty reduction plan process is co-Chaired by the City and Vancity's Manager of Community Investment, Catherine Ludgate, and seeks to better address pathways into and out of poverty and promote economic wellbeing and inclusion across all 13 of the Healthy City goals.



Figure 1: Healthy City Strategy

What We Heard

The “What We Heard: Phase 1” report is a summary of the findings from the first phase of engagement that took place from 2017-2018 through 15 deep listening sessions with over 250 people. The goal of the initial public engagement sessions was to identify solution-focused recommendations to improve equity and access and connectivity to resources, safety and economic inclusion for people experiencing widespread discrimination, poor health, gendered and racial violence and poverty in Vancouver.

Early engagement findings suggest that people experiencing extreme poverty in particular may not: a) have their diversity of needs met; b) know about and/or directly experience impacts of the City's existing initiatives; or c) understand how each initiative may intentionally connect to address their full range of day-to-day immediate needs. The Phase 1 engagement sessions provided an opportunity to better understand the daily challenges faced by these Vancouver residents, in their own words as much as possible. Of note, the methodology proposed for these sessions outlined in the process methodology section was problematic to some groups and was adapted by community hosts facilitators to reflect a trauma-informed approach to ensure safety.

Extreme –or “absolute” –poverty was defined by the United Nations in 1995 as “...a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services.”¹ In a city that attracts and retains significant wealth, it is both a reality and an irony that extreme poverty exists. Inequities between low and high income residents are increasing,

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/world-summit-for-social-development-1995/wssd-1995-agreements/pawssd-chapter-2.html>

and Vancouver has the second highest gap between rich and poor of all major cities in Canada. The consequences of this gap are harmful for everyone, not just those experiencing poverty, and include, among other consequences, a reduced sense of trust, social connections, and belonging across income groups. Income inequality also correlates to higher levels of policing and more people being exposed to the criminal justice system. Poverty reduction plans need to pay attention to taking steps to reduce gaps and intersections, in particular those of racialized and gendered inequities.

While there are clearly actions for all levels of government to take, residents participating in Phase 1 engagement processes identified key roles for the City that could address key gaps, including naming discrimination and racism – with an emphasis on anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Black racism – enhancing access to existing initiatives, supporting new innovative programs or projects, and fostering priority partnerships. In the spirit of ‘action while planning’, the Poverty Action Advisory Committee recommended a number of meaningful actions that the City could initiate while developing the Poverty Reduction Plan.

What We Learned

The full range of Phase 1 activities informing what we learned about poverty in Vancouver included:

- Events, policy forums and community meetings held by the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) exploring the foundations of an Urban Indigenous Strategy;
- Public workshop sessions with community organizations and people experiencing poverty to inform City of Vancouver submissions to senior governments on the creation of federal and provincial poverty reduction strategies²;
- Participation in forums and workshops held by UBC, SFU and other partners exploring guaranteed income, immigration and refugee experiences of poverty, community economic development, advocacy and social innovation (systems change) and other relevant areas;
- Research into best practices, models and approaches for municipal poverty reduction initiatives across Canada³;
- Extensive engagement with over 500 people with lived experience of poverty, organizations and government partners. We learned that the “Day in the Life” methodology was not a safe and trauma-informed approach for all groups engaged; community hosts adapted the methodology to best practice in several cases.

What’s Next

Currently, staff are undertaking Phase 2 of engagement to broaden discussions with employers, universities and colleges, and Vancouverites who might not identify as living in poverty but are struggling to make ends meet – such as seniors, single parents, racialized communities, immigrants, young people, including students and others. Vancouverites facing affordability challenges may be at risk of experiencing poverty due to rising cost of living, stagnant wages, precariousness of work and housing, discrimination and exclusion, and other factors. Phase 2 engagement activities with employers, universities and colleges, and Vancouverites who are struggling to make ends meet will provide another opportunity for collaborative action on poverty reduction.

² See the City’s submission to Employment and Social Development Canada prepared in 2017 <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/prosperity-for-all-through-a-healthy-communities-approach.pdf>

³ See 2017 Healthy City Scholar report “Setting the Stage for a City of Vancouver Poverty Reduction Plan” at https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/sustain.ubc.ca/files/GCS/2017_GCS/Final_Reports/Setting%20the%20Stage%20for%20a%20City%20of%20Vancouver%20Poverty%20Reduction%20Plan_Hayes_%202017%20GCS.pdf

The City's poverty reduction plan process has proceeded alongside the Provincial and Federal processes to create poverty reduction plans for these senior levels of government, and the City has submitted recommendations to both in consultation with community partners. The Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC) is developing an integrated Urban Indigenous Strategy to promote culturally connected and interconnected actions to promote prosperity for urban Indigenous residents. This presents a rare opportunity for the City to work in partnership with other levels of government and community partners to mutually reinforce and align efforts that promote meaningful actions for all Vancouverites struggling to make ends meet.

Eight actions were identified as meaningful and high impact in Phase 1. The City is currently working to initiate the following actions:

1. Develop Equity Framework to allow for embedded and urgent action to address poverty and interconnected forms of structural discrimination across all City departments/business services;
2. Set up working groups with senior governments, community partners and people with lived experience to coordinate, align and implement poverty reduction strategies or initiatives;
3. Continue to support MVAEC to engage with the urban Indigenous community and develop a comprehensive Urban Indigenous Strategy;
4. Explore simplified and shared registration processes across services and programs to improve access to recreation, leisure, cultural events and information for residents facing affordability and equity related barriers (e.g. 'All Access Card');
5. Explore expansion of Citywide peer employment opportunities, including a pilot at community centres across the city, to create welcoming and safe environments for low income residents;
6. Direct staff to partner with the agencies to identify how Vancouver's charitable food system can better promote dignity and access to affordable, healthy food;
7. Include TGV2S policies in Housing Vancouver Strategy;
8. Explore options to expand access to affordable transportation that aligns with Transportation 2040 goals, including:
 - Universal access pilots, including all residents on Income Assistance; and
 - Shared transportation pilot for residents to participate in events, access to nature, and cultural activities.

The City of Vancouver Poverty Reduction Plan final report with complete recommendations is expected to be received by City Council in the Fall of 2019.

Phase 1 Engagement - Process/Methodology

While this framework seeks to connect City actions with senior government actions on poverty, there was a general feeling of “engagement fatigue” with issues related to poverty reduction. Hearing what has already been said was a key theme in this initial phase, as well as applying an intersectional lens to the work. Including voices systemically excluded in City processes required a high level of care and attention to the needs of individuals and groups engaging with the City on sensitive and personal issues, and resourcing people adequately for their expertise and time. As part of an ongoing learning process, the City learned there was more work to do to address systemic barriers to “getting this right”. Developing an Equity Framework for the City is part of the next step in learning from our mistakes and embedding equity and best practice across all the City’s work.

Poverty Action Advisory Committee (PAAC) members and group participants also described the need for clear, plain language to describe what is happening for people with lived experiences of poverty in the City. While it is challenging to capture the full depth of meaning and emotion shared through the listening sessions, this report seeks to honour the words of community members who so generously shared their experience of living in poverty. A summary of actions taken to respond to community requests are below:

Recommendations	Actions taken
Allow safer and more comfortable spaces for people with lived experiences of poverty to discuss issues without fear of government officials listening or being present.	Supported train-the-trainer workshops and peer-facilitation of listening sessions. Each participating group was encouraged to hold sessions in space they chose, and to identify own facilitators. Resourced organizations for use of space and food for participants.
Fairly compensate people with lived experiences of poverty for their time and contributions to the process.	Honoraria to every participant of the listening sessions at a rate of \$20/hour for their time; peer facilitators were paid for training and facilitating at \$25/hour.
Allow participants to operate the listening sessions in their own ways and record using their own words, notes and ways of communicating.	Provided the “day in the life” model as a guide to incorporate a social determinant of health, systems approach and encouraged partners and facilitators to adapt methodology as needed. Accepted all forms of submission from full group reports to individual surveys and piles of sticky notes.
Use people’s own words and stories as much as possible to honour experiences and accurately express challenges and solutions	Under high level themes, quotes and stories are included as a way to include the words of participants. Sometimes these quotes are taken from the facilitators’ notes, so they may or may not be the exact words as spoken in the sessions. In a very small number of cases, minor details have been changed to ensure the privacy of the participants, without losing or changing the meaning of their statement.
Be aware of sensitivities, such as exploiting people’s stories and privacy concerns	Being aware of privacy concerns, identifying demographic details where changed to avoid identification. Throughout this report we are including stories provided by participants and taken directly from notes and transcripts. These are not composite stories, but real quotes and notes from individuals who participated in listening sessions.

Acknowledge the inter-relationships between poverty, gendered and racial violence, racism and discrimination	Finally, we should point out that none of these themes completely capture all the interconnections between these issues. Many issues are closely inter-related to other issues in ways that talking about housing means talking about pets, or talking about reconciliation means talking about anti-Indigenous racism, persistent colonial structures, white privilege, truth-telling and access to culture.
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Poverty Action Advisory Committee

In April 2018, the City initiated the Poverty Action Advisory Committee (PAAC), made up of approximately 40 community organizations and people with lived experience of poverty (See Appendix A – PAAC Membership). At the first meeting, the PAAC advised the City to be bold, to address stigma around poverty, and to take action on recommendations. Partners also expressed the need to work in partnership on the design and implementation of the engagement and poverty reduction plan development processes. For full recommendations from PAAC, see Appendix B.

Community Action Network (CAN)

The City funded and worked with the Community Action Network (CAN) to pilot the first phase of engagement with people living in poverty in the Downtown Eastside and nearby communities, committing to principles including: maintaining honest, ongoing, and respectful dialogues; truly hearing what is said; deciding together what to do based on what is heard and learned; and involving residents in implementing the plan they have helped develop⁴. An initiative formed within the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, the Community Action Network “...provides an opportunity for capacity-building for individuals in Metro Vancouver with the lived experience of poverty as they aim to increase their involvement in anti-poverty advocacy, policy development that impacts poverty, and the creation of poverty reduction plans at the provincial and civic levels to train and empower people with lived experience to represent themselves in media, speak to City councils or other government bodies through capacity building, education and peer support”.⁵

Urban Indigenous Engagement: MVAEC Partnership Approach

The City of Vancouver has an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding with the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC), outlining the commitment to working together to support urban Indigenous agencies and residents in Vancouver. MVAEC is currently leading work through a Collective Impact project with urban Indigenous leaders and key partners. Two additional MVAEC policy papers have also been influential in the first phase of engagement for the City’s poverty reduction plan, including the *Potlatch Economy* paper, outlining economic well-being from a cultural perspective, as well as *The Psychology of Poverty*, providing a self-determination approach to healing from the inter-generational impacts of colonialism, structural and systemic violence and discrimination.

What we heard from MVAEC is clear direction that a ‘poverty-based’ or deficit-based approach to economic well-being is contradictory to an Indigenous strength-based approach. The City will continue to support MVAEC’s leadership in developing an Urban Indigenous Strategy in 2019/2020 as part of our collective efforts to promote inclusive and equitable economic prosperity within a cultural framework for urban Indigenous residents, and align the Healthy City Strategy with a strength-based approach

⁴ These principals are based on the work of Howard and Menezes (Promise Neighbourhoods Institute, 2010)

⁵ For more information visit <https://www.actionnetwork.ca/>

including Indigenous-led wellness indicators. MVAEC is a member of the Poverty Action Advisory Committee (PAAC).

Towards Collaborative Action & Intersectional Inclusion

The Poverty Action Advisory Committee (PAAC) guided the first phase of engagement for the project. Of note, the PAAC noted several initiatives underway that the City could officially support through the work of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition⁶, as well as community reports outlining key actions recommended for inclusion in the City's Poverty Reduction efforts⁷. These actions and alignments to final recommendations will be listed in the forthcoming Poverty Reduction Plan.

The City worked with the PAAC and community partners to design and support community engagement sessions with people who have lived experiences of poverty or other deep challenges to life in Vancouver. These partners provided direction on how to engage with the people they served, and how City staff should or should not participate to support principles of safety. Key recommendations from the PAAC are summarized in Appendix B. Again, of note, not all PAAC members agree the 'Day in the Life' model should be used as best practice moving forward, and that solutions-focused workshops should be used to avoid triggering and traumatizing people with lived experience.

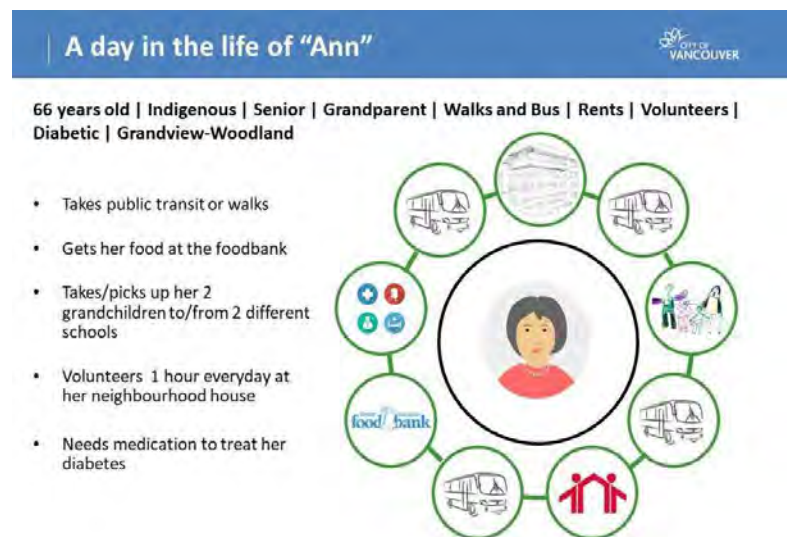


Figure 2: Listening Session Example for "day in the life" Methodology

Based on these principles and recommendations, the core of Phase 1 engagement was 15 listening sessions. These sessions were opportunities for "deep listening" and to focus on understanding "a day in the life" of Vancouver residents.

⁶ BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, ABC Poverty Reduction Plan (<https://www.abcplan.ca/>); and, All on Board campaign (<http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/take-action/allonboard/>)

⁷ MVAEC Collective Impact; DTES Women's Coalition (November 2014) Getting to the Roots: Exploring Systemic Violence Against Women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (<http://wish-vancouver.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Getting-to-the-Roots-final-Nov-2-2014.pdf>), Potluck Café/LED Lab: Pathways Out of Poverty: Social Hiring and Income Assistance http://ledlab.ca/portfolio/pathways_out_of_poverty_social_hiring_and_income_assistance/, Our Place Graduation Strategy <http://raycam.com/2017/07/25/graduation-strategy-2/>, LEDLab and Simon Fraser University, Kimberly Dawn Mackenzie, "On Assistance, Can Work: The Unrealized Employment Potential in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (2017) <http://ledlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Mackenzie-On-assistance-can-work-thesis.pdf>, LEDLab "The Downtown Eastside Information Hub Survey: Mapping the continuum of income generating opportunities in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (December, 2015) http://ledlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/DTES-Information-Hub-Survey-Project-Full-Report_branded.compressed1.pdf

What We Heard: Cross-Cutting Themes

Sessions focused on giving space to voices that are too often excluded from City processes to speak about specific challenges and how these are experienced in everyday contexts, as well as hopes and dreams for accessibility and inclusion across the city. Some issues in the listening sessions came up repeatedly and cut across all other issues. These have been highlighted separately because they are not just items that can be solved with a quick fix – they are systemic problems that require either changes in the way services are provided or significant coordination to support better alignment and connectivity. Although these sessions are listed geographically, sessions hosted by the several community hosts, including the City's People with Lived Experience Advisory and Hogan's Alley Society, included people from across Vancouver.

Figure 3: Listening Sessions – Phase 1



1. Dignity/Racism/Stigma

Common Related Topics: food; access to information and processes; housing; health; employment/education; childcare; safety; anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism/discrimination

A constant theme across all sessions was how demoralizing the housing and service systems are and how powerless people feel over their situations. People described how so much of their lives are spent standing in lines waiting for minimal necessities or waiting in front of service centres in the rain, on

display to the world. Others described how they are disrespected and mistreated because they are low-income, which is exacerbated by racial identity and other structural discrimination. They are treated inhumanely by other residents simply because they are experiencing challenges or are different.

The quality of things like food and clothes they are given is of low quality: they feel they are given things that other people would not eat or use themselves, which is painful and impacts their sense of dignity. The daily grind of survival is hard enough, but expired food, poor treatment by support workers and law enforcement, and grueling conditions in lineups and social housing make surviving even harder. The system challenges their ability to make their lives better even when it is supposed to be designed to support them.

Another aspect of this issue was lack of choice and control. Participants described many situations where the rules connected to housing or other systems do not allow them to live freely like other people in the city. They cannot bring guests to their SRO apartments or cannot choose their own clothes and food. Most of the systems that support people in difficulty give only narrow and pre-chosen goods so that there is no room for individuality, choice, or personal control.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issues of dignity and stigma:

- “Everyone has aspirations and right to live in a decent home, get an education – especially for your kids, have a job where you can feel happy and productive.”
- “The city uses the DTES as a pejorative.”
- “Wishes COV would adopt VCH food strategy about what food is given out in communities – not white flour and sugar foods, white Styrofoam, need more dignity and more rigorous provision. It is killing people across Vancouver. If that’s the only option it’s a sad way to get yourself out of poverty.”
- “Food bank: Whatever neighborhoods they go to they make people stand outside for 3-4 hours. In those line-ups (at Mt. Pleasant) 30-40 percent are Indigenous, youth, etc. Fights break out, etc. No dignity in this. There’s a food policy council, but it’s disconnected from neighborhoods, neighborhood associations, etc. Need more dignified access to healthy foods.”
- “Right now I’m in an SRO. I hate it. They want to tell me how to decorate my window.”
- “Having a low-income takes away my freedom. I don’t have choices about what to buy and how to spend money. I rely on places that serve food and places to give me clothes and whatever housing building I am put in. My living conditions are controlled for me.”
- “Being poor means having to go see so many workers and find different programs every day to stay alive and tell your story over even if you don’t want to. Being poor is a lot of work.”
- “I feel shame being in poverty and accessing services. I feel quite isolated at this time.”
- “Race is so much systematic. The impact is faced every day. Whether we are walking down the street and we feel the police’s eyes on us. We feel it when we go to the grocery store when we feel people’s eyes on us. If we were born with a different pigment of skin we would not have this issue.”

Recommendations participants made regarding dignity and stigma included:

- “There must be constant outreach and awareness about the mental, emotional and upsets of poverty and the loss of lives and how it all compiles up. We are devastatingly alone and vulnerable to being lost to our loved ones. People need to be more open and understanding of what it’s like to be poor.”

- “If there was a drop-in space, employing peers, that would welcome you in. Not just when you are pregnant, but for all the time. If people like us were there and could walk around with us, we wouldn’t feel like we were the only ones.”
- “Managing anxiety and stigma is a key success/risk factor for addiction recovery. Centralized services (income assistance, health, child/support services) would greatly assist. Key to this access/effectiveness would be peers welcoming people into face-to-face client settings.”

2. Income Program Constraints

Common topics: *housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; transition; safety; employment/education; amenities/leisure; access to information and processes; food; health*

Participants across all sessions described the extreme difficulties that they faced living on social assistance. The amount of money provided is extremely low and it does not keep up with the cost of living. This is especially difficult in Vancouver where the expense of housing and other basics are increasing rapidly. The systemic barriers to getting social assistance are also a problem because the documentation and requirements needed (e.g. like having an advocate, providing identification, etc.) keep people from getting resources.

People feel penalized for working because as soon as they start making money their benefits are reduced, but they are often not making enough money to survive or their employment situation is unstable so they need social assistance to smooth out their income. Also, the act of working itself costs money: transportation is needed to get to work and back, tools and clothing might be needed for the job, and day care for children is a constant issue. There is not enough money in the social assistance system to live a basic life, but there is also not enough to get out of poverty and live a better life. This is a constant trap of the system. Every aspect of a person’s life requires money: food, clothing, transit, housing, work, childcare, utilities, medicine, recreation, etc. The lack of money and gaps between the cost of living and social assistance amounts creates a spiraling cycle of poverty.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of social assistance:

- “Welfare – they ask you for so many things (documents), and then they give you very little money. In Vancouver the prices increase and everything is more expensive, but the help does not increase.”
- “I couldn’t get on welfare until I got an advocate. We shouldn’t need advocates to get on social assistance.”
- “I can’t afford anything on such little money. I see that with everyone, social assistance to pensioners to working poor.”
- “Disability assistance is not enough as cost of living goes up.”
- “As a newcomer, I can’t live on \$375 and try to find a job and try to go to school and do all the things they tell me I have to do.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding social assistance included:

- “Social assistance needs to be raised when housing prices are going up and housing prices can’t go up when social assistance goes up.”
- “Welfare and pension and disability assistance should go up to match inflation and cost of living.”
- “Reduce cost of living by having free childcare, free transit and free tuition for families in poverty.”
- “We need an income-transition plan for those moving from welfare to work.”

- “I had to loan money from a money lender and they take so much money off, it’s a rip off. Poor people should have access to interest-free and service-free loans.”
- “Income should cover and reflect all costs (transport, food, safety, childcare, recreation).”
- “3 months [free] insurance for your car? An incentive program for when you start working? “

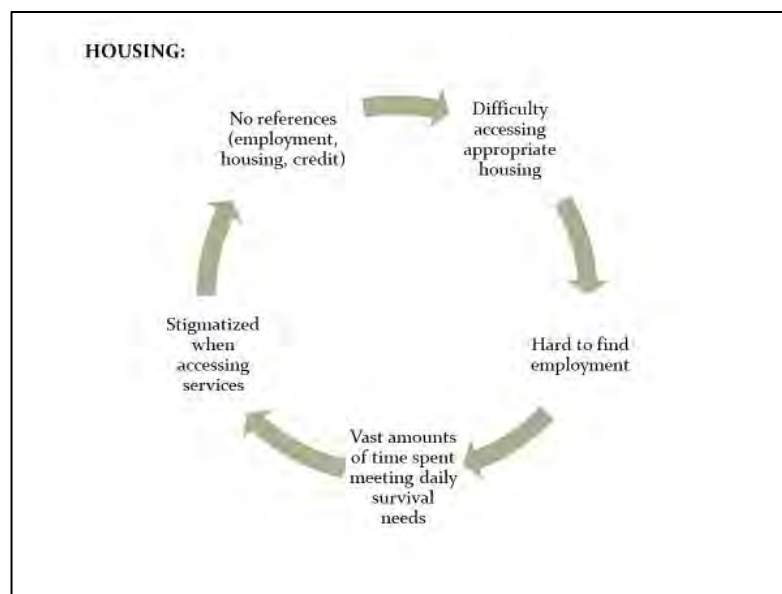
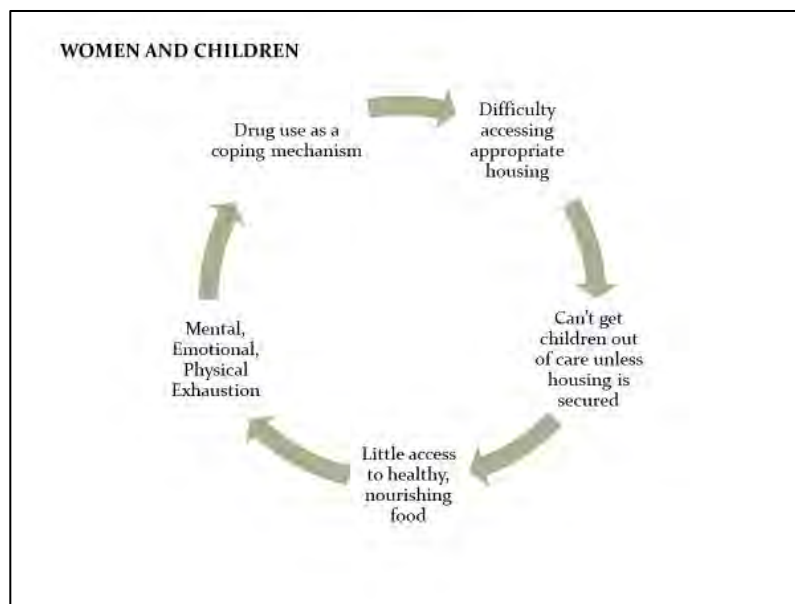
3. Cycles and Traps

Common topics: social assistance; housing; health; location of services; cost of living; employment/education; transportation; safety; accessible information and services; immigrants; seniors; women and gender equity; law enforcement; youth; First Nations/Reconciliation; racism/discrimination

Most of the issues discussed were connected to other issues in ways that prevented anyone from getting ahead. A common theme repeated again and again was that there are cycles in systems that trap people in poverty. Many people

described how making more money cost them more money so they could never actually increase their net income. Others described the link between housing and work: if you cannot get stable housing it is extremely difficult to hold down a job, but if you cannot get a full-time job you cannot get a lease for an apartment or basement suite. People with anxiety and mental health issues find it more difficult to get stable housing and jobs, but the lack of stable housing and jobs is stressful and exacerbates their anxiety and mental health issues. Some people with substance use issues expressed the need to avoid the Downtown Eastside (DTES) to stay clean, but most of the services for recovery and basic living are in the DTES which can draw them back into active substance use.

Some traps seemed to be rule-



based, while others were income- or cost-based. Some systems are set up in ways where low-income residents have to prove their status or a specific condition, but they cannot get that proof because of another barrier. The rules that are made for these systems do not match the lived experience of people trying to use those systems. On the other hand, there are costs that come with getting work or getting access to services and supports. If people cannot afford basic necessities they usually cannot afford to get access to the replacements of those necessities provided by governments and non-profits when they require travel, medical tests, or other personal investments of time and money.

In many cases, the lack of coordination between various providers creates cycles and traps. All of these issues have an impact on people's lives, but many of the service providers work in silos that are separate from other providers or provision strategies. There needs to be more understanding and action to minimize unintended consequences and harmonize the work across silos.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of cycles and traps:

- "After daycare subsidy it still costs \$300. Whatever work shifts she can get goes to the daycare so working doesn't help her income. It doesn't make any sense how it works."
- "I was homeless 17 times and my health condition got worse but being on the street I couldn't find a doctor but then I couldn't get my medication which my mental health worse and made it harder for me to get off the street. It was a shitty cycle."
- "It took me almost two years to get on disability. I had to prove I had all these problems with my doctor but some of the tests I couldn't pay for because I was still on welfare and didn't have disability money yet."
- "My job is in Burnaby and it takes me one hour every day to get there. But my income is so low that it's better for me to take fewer shifts and get free food at the women's center some days. Even though I want to work and don't want to sit idle, I can't afford to work every day otherwise it's more expensive for me to buy my groceries and get my food."
- "When in recovery, we are encouraged to become a member of society. But how can we do that without any money to go to the gym, to go out for dinner or buy clothes?"
- "The government do not allow us to study and get an education, so we stay in a cycle of poverty... I don't have access to basic services if I don't have PR or citizenship, even though my kids have citizenship – the government is making my kids live in poverty. I want to study but I am not allowed. If you don't have status and even if your kids have status, they are not allowed to get an education here."

4. Transit and Transportation

Common topics: cost of living; food; childcare; accessible services; income assistance; safety; amenities/leisure; housing; racism/discrimination

Although transit might seem to be its own issue, for people facing barriers it impacts every part of their lives. To access the food bank and get food home, people use buses, but it is difficult and expensive to navigate transit with children and bags of food. To get to work, it might take several bus trips during the day which costs additional money and time. Seniors, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, Indigenous peoples, and people of color all report various challenges of using transit - from racism and discrimination to lack of appropriate space on transit to accommodate their needs.

Another aspect of the transportation issue is the barriers to using private transportation options for those who might be able or want to use them. People who have been through the justice system or who owe debts to ICBC cannot always get their driver's licenses, while those who might want to drive cannot afford to get lessons to learn. Parking is extremely expensive so going to the doctor or getting to work can be difficult. Shared bike systems often require credit cards or identification, and even people who might want to walk cannot afford proper footwear.

The cost of transit cannot be over-emphasized. Even though many services may be located in the same geographic area like "Downtown", they are still spread out enough that they require more than just short walks to get between. People with various mobility issues or who cannot walk long distances must then take multiple trips in one day. People might never have enough income at any one time to buy a longer-term pass, so they are forced to pay more on a per-trip basis. People who can find steady work often do not find it near social or low-income housing. This means they have to take bus trips often across multiple zones to get to and from work. This work may still be very low-wage so the cost of transit significantly eats into their pay. People with families have to pay for all the members of the family which makes the simplest outing very expensive.

There is also a lot of unpredictability for transit users. The overcrowding on buses makes it difficult to know if and when you can get to work on time. Those who rely on "free rides" on buses are never sure whether or not they will get a friendly bus driver who will let them on or a strict one that will kick them off. Bus driver attitudes were commonly pointed out as problematic, with some drivers making it more difficult for Indigenous riders, people with mental health issues, and bidders from getting on or staying on buses. This was especially problematic for bidders because transporting their cans and bottles is part of their livelihood, but they often have to choose between taking public transportation or using stolen shopping carts, both of which present their own problems. More generally people also described how difficult it is to get things from place to place. There are more options for transporting people, but when people have to transport items there are few options for people with low income. There is lots of free furniture and baby supplies on Craigslist, but it is not possible to get them from the suburbs or across town. If someone needs to move or change housing, there are few or no services to help them get their belongings from one place to another.

Finally, the cost and stress of transportation cuts people off from other parts of the city and the activities or amenities that they contain. Some people feel stuck in the Downtown Eastside and it adds to their stress. It is difficult to access other parks, other people, the beach, classes, or other things that benefit people's lives. This can make life in the city very narrow and claustrophobic.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of transit:

- "Three zone passes are very expensive and people are having to travel that far for work. It's cheaper to have a car."
- "I get the bus to see the doctor, it takes me an hour."
- "Bringing home food bank items is a big struggle."
- "A lot of stresses on transportation with children with disabilities."
- "Taking transit 1-2 hours each way every day – stress, fatigue, wait, and crowd."
- "Buses too full with people. Can't get on with stroller."

- “Transit creates dissonance between fare payers and non-fare payers . Rush hour and someone is trying to get on to go to the bottle depot, everyone is unhappy. It creates less community cohesion. This is a *job* for binners; it’s work.”
- “Transit is the biggest challenge. Getting anywhere that’s for things need to be carried it costs almost \$8 because we have kids.”
- “Parking is a big issue. Pay parking is so outrageous. Going to doctors’ office, pay parking around hospitals especially - \$6-\$10/ hour. Who could afford that? And especially 9am – 10pm. Cannot visit loved ones in the hospital if pay parking costs an arm & a leg.”
- “Handy Dart services have been cut so I can’t access some of my services anymore that I used to attend and one of my food programs that provided nutritious food.”
- “I find work far away but can’t afford the transit pass for three zones.”
- “I save up enough for appointments but no travel for leisure activity.”
- “Need good shoes for walking.”
- “Don’t have the time to study for my learner’s license. Would love to be able to drive one day. No one to help me study. How do I even practice? No money for lessons/ No one’s car to borrow.”
- “If you don’t use a Compass Card paying for the bus the ticket doesn’t get you on the skytrain.”
- “Anytime I was pulled off for not paying transit they really treated me in a way that was so escalated, they called other cops, they were making a scene. I don’t think they do that to other passengers.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding transit included:

- “Free passes should be available for those with low incomes.”
- “City ‘free zone’ in the downtown core.”
- “Rather than taking your chance on a nice bus driver, would be better to have free times on the bus so people don’t have to feel bad about getting on and asking for a ride.”
- “Training/awareness for bus drivers about those living in poverty.”
- “Children shouldn’t be paying for bus fare especially when parents have disability.”
- “Is there a way to work with Translink to improve transportation access, foster better relationships and build understanding / social inclusion?”

Highlight Story

“Getting out of the house and into ‘the world’ is hard enough when you are recovering from addiction. Then you have to deal with transit, stigma of bus drivers who won’t let you ride for free or the thought you have to ask for a free ride because you have only \$95/month for basic human needs. Once you make it there, you feel like everyone is staring at you. It’s intimidating. I know going to the gym, swimming and going in the sauna is going to make the world of difference, but it’s just too hard.” – Listening Session Participant

5. Time Poverty

Common topics: *social assistance; housing; cost of living; food; transportation; safety; accessible information and processes; health; racism/discrimination*

Similar to the financial costs of poverty described above, the issue of time was pervasive through every discussion. People are constantly waiting in lines to access basic needs and services like food, medical treatment, addiction maintenance, meetings with support workers, etc. Similarly, using public

transportation or walking due to lack of other transit options adds significant additional time to daily activities. Many hours of each person's days are spent simply waiting or traveling. These extra hours take away from work, personal care, cooking, family time, education, and other important activities. In turn, the lower amount of dedicated time for personal issues exacerbates the very conditions that create and maintain poverty (like lack of steady income, good health, compliance with legal requirements, etc.).

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of time:

- "Everything takes so much time (e.g., waiting in lines, waiting to speak to a live person as opposed to doing things online)."
- "Everything is or can be a struggle. Basic amenities, and everything is time consuming – waking up in a not so safe or secure environment. Living outside or in a small room, have to get up early and get in line just to store things in a locker, and these are limited. Then line up elsewhere to get a shower, or other basics. Your day is really structured in line-ups just for basic needs, much less getting employment or income. You might be struggling with welfare so you might not be getting your money. Doing nice things for yourself becomes really compressed (time)."
- "Being homeless I am supposed to be finding housing, but there is no housing and I spend most of my day trying to figure out where I will eat, where I will clean myself, where I can clean my clothes, how to store my stuff, where to get seasonal wear, try not to have my bedding stolen. I am surviving hour to hour."
- "People spend a lot of their time waiting in line-ups."
- "How do people have time to go to doctors/dentist/health/laundry? I barely got it done cuz my boss is understanding and flexible."
- "Waiting to see a nurse in the hospital, 3 hours +."
- "Visit Carnegie to access email 1-2 hour wait."
- "Go [] pick up cold meds, 2 hour wait."

6. Accessible Information and Processes

Common topics: housing; health; employment/education; safety; First Nations/Reconciliation; isolation/loneliness

A common issue that prevents many people from accessing services and supports is simply the lack of information or understanding about how processes work. Information is decentralized and often passed by word-of-mouth. It is difficult for people to know or find out about the array of programs and livelihood options that exist across the city. This means that they either miss out on important supports or they spend more money and time on unnecessary expenses that could be put to more critical uses.

The specific methods of accessing information are also problematic. Many participants reported barriers to IT services, typically because internet options are few and oversubscribed. Many people don't have computers at home or they have older phones that are not internet-ready (if they have a phone at all). There are also too many people waiting to use too few public computers, so it is difficult to get access to the internet from free sources.

Other barriers include the lack of services provided in other languages, which makes it difficult for new Canadians or others with limited English or literacy issues to navigate systems. Participants also

described the need for peer supports to access programs and services that they may know about, but are unable to access by themselves. The emotional and informational support that peers provide is missing from many institutional systems that rely on staff that have no connections or lived experience to low-income or marginalized communities.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of accessing information and processes:

- “Seniors need e-services for medical information, to set up appointments, etc. Access to wifi, computers etc – the libraries and community services have them, but the people don’t have them or good access.”
- “[Need] changes in accessibility for information for people who just came to Canada. Lack of information is the most vulnerable thing in the world.”
- “Legal advice – very challenging to access it here.”
- “The cost of having internet is very expensive for people and to access it at the free places means waiting in line.”
- “They did not have anyone to help them get through the system. Lucky to know English so he could google. Random people were kind enough to help.”
- “It is not easy to get a social worker assigned to support you. You need to show you are very sick, the government spends a lot of time investigating you before they approve it.”
- “Knows woman who got her positive decision after the hearing. Paid lawyer \$6,000 for PR and paperwork and didn’t know about SOS services for free.”
- “Tried to submit the [Leisure Pass] application in person but it was not the right location and was not accepted. Tried to email but no one responded and then there were problems. Submitted copy of PR to access the services but then they still asked for it again. Still happy with the access pass though.”
- “The barriers that I’ve seen over the years is that the resources available don’t advertise enough so people don’t know what is out there.”
- “It takes real courage to call the Ministry. When you are living in poverty, it’s hard on your self-esteem. I don’t know how many times I’ve been in tears on the phone.”

Recommendations participants made regarding accessing information and processes included:

- “With Amazon and other investments, e-services should be a solvable problem here. We can get more resources for these benefits. Community Benefit Agreements for businesses if they locate here?”
- “Library is great and pay phones are crucial—have more phones available for long-distance calls”
- “Need access to information through peers, website, information hubs. Many didn’t know about where to go when seeking treatment/recovery options.”
- “Access to phones difficult. Could there be a program that donates free phone/program for three months until you can get back on your feet?”
- “Peer navigators/valets at community centres to break down stigma.”
- “Free community center passes automatically (not everyone knows how to apply).”

Specific Issue Themes

In addition to the cross-cutting themes described above, there were also many individual issues that presented challenges or barriers for people with lived experiences of poverty and others. These too often interconnected with other themes. However, they primarily engage with a specific realm of a person's life.

7. Amenities/Leisure

Common topics: *employment/education; social assistance; housing; cost of living; health; First Nations/Reconciliation; safety; racism/discrimination*

A very significant part of the listening sessions was the focus on recreation and leisure. It was important for participants to point out that leisure is not frivolous. It is a substantial part of daily life and is critical for the mental health of people who are dealing with trauma, daily hardship, and multiple barriers. Physical activities and sports are important for physical health, but facilities like gyms and recreation centers can be out of reach for some Vancouver residents.

Most recreation and leisure activities cost money to access or participate in and even when they are subsidized they still cost more than many people can afford. Some access requires identification, credit cards, or the filling out of forms that may be prohibitive for some people. The surveillance of many spaces and the people who access them can be threatening to populations already bearing the stigma of being low-income or marginalized, and consequently they are made to feel implicitly or explicitly unwelcome.

Perhaps most importantly, participants took this opportunity to request activities or amenities that would improve their daily lives. It is important to note how much of this focused on the need for fun, joy, and personal fulfillment. In many ways this was just as important as other needs like food and shelter.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of amenities and leisure:

- "Struggle to look for hang-out place due to SRO (single room occupancy) living conditions. Right now most places have interactions with police. Social life is nil with SRO tenants."
- "This is the one neighborhood that doesn't have a community center with gyms, meeting rooms, etc.; The spaces to develop social skills, meeting groups, etc for residents are not really there."
- "The leisure access pass is great, but I receive only \$130 per month, so even with 50% discount I can't afford any programs/classes and can't really afford the fitness rooms @3.15 per visit."
- "There are no money to socialize. Everything cost money, we don't have money to go out and socialize."
- "There is no time for recreation because I have to work a lot, which impacts my health."
- "To access recreation services, you need to complete a form where they ask you how much money you make, if you receive a pension or extra money from other sources, then they decide how much

money you need to pay. If you are above the limit, then your family or yourself have to pay for the cost of recreation.”

- “I like to do art work – having an artist space and free to everyone would be amazing – adults, not just youth, they need this too!”
- “I love Aboriginal Day because everything is free.”
- “Trout Lake Community Centre: they have a building fund and it’s put away compared to operations. Brand new building, barriered populations can’t enter because it’s all fee for service and those populations can’t afford it.”
- “City spaces: library, parks – why so security / policed? Feels non-inclusive, gentrified.”
- “Want to learn piano and cannot afford it.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding amenities and leisure included:

- “[Need] round the clock spaces for multi-purpose usage with equipment and supplies.”
- “Daily activities request – cable subscription free.”
- “Provide more inspiration passes plus a bus pass during those two weeks.”
- “Increase distribution of leisure access pass, link it to Mobi Bike Share.”
- “Community bikes should be available for all and not depending on credit cards.”
- “Lower cost of rent for peoples’ birthday parties, gatherings, etc. – for free.”
- “More cultural events, embracing culture, language, traditions.”
- “More accessible artist spaces for adults/seniors that is free; it is way too regulated.”
- “More water parks and wave pools.”
- “Water parks for dogs.”
- “Neighborhood houses are some of the few organizations that focus on social and recreational issues – limited because they are financially constrained. Good context to bring back infrastructure to support community social and recreational needs.”
- “Recreation pass should be for five years.”

8. Childcare

Common topics: *social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; employment/education; safety; newly arrive immigrants; women and gender equity; racism/discrimination*

There were many discussions around the expense of childcare or the lack of childcare options. For some the lack of access to childcare makes full-time work impossible. For others, the cost of childcare often equals the amount of money they are making on a regular basis, so it makes getting ahead in life by working pointless.

Some people described how it was difficult to raise children because there are few social and cultural supports beyond formal daycare. Some have family who are dispersed throughout the region or province so they cannot rely on them for childcare. Some feel that the culture here is such that people do not readily take care of each other’s children. In some cases, the type of daycare offered was not appropriate. There was a desire to see more daycares for those with special needs or that are open at flexible times.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of childcare:

- “I have to work to pay the daycare of my baby and after that I have no more money.”
- “Daycare after subsidy \$300, basically work for daycare.”
- “Whatever work shifts she can get goes to the daycare so working doesn’t help her income. It doesn’t make any sense how it works.”
- “There are barriers to taking care of kids here – in Latin America you have a family that can support you; here you are alone.”
- “The Ministry (MCFD) is always harassing and taking away babies because we are poor but then pay foster families to take care of our babies. This is worse than residential schools. They should give us the money instead of paying white families’ mortgages.”
- “Single mums cannot go back to school because of lack of child care and they are low income and because of language barrier they are unable to engage in the community. Day care is expensive.”
- “Children are being apprehended for risk of neglect. If you live in poverty and may not be able to feed your kid for that month then that is grounds to take away the kids. This is done instead of providing groceries or food.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding childcare included:

- “Free daycare.”
- “[Need] social worker for daycare referral.”
- “[Need] free snacks for children in schools and aftercare.”
- “[Need] special needs childcare.”

9. Employment/Education

Common topics: *social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; health; racism/discrimination*

Employment and education are key components in cycles of poverty. Without education it is difficult to get a job. Without money earned from employment, it is difficult to afford school. For homeless people it is almost impossible to find work without an address, in addition to other barriers such as finding appropriate clothing or a place to clean up in the morning. People spoke about access to education as a right. Many people volunteer in their community and while it gives structure and meaning to the volunteer, they are not paid for the work and therefore receive little recognition for the important role they play in the community.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of employment and education:

- “Being on welfare is defeating when you are trying to recover. Not having an education, having a criminal record, knowing that you need access to education, food, transportation to get paid a minimum wage – it’s very defeating.”
- “Women trades program not known about. Note that men are often connected to unions through contract work in the trades, etc. and can access different supports while in recovery, while women more likely to work in retail, sex work – pulled back into addictions.”
- “Getting work by labour standards only counts if recognized and paid school only promotes it further.”

- “Stop the constant cycle of poverty. If auxiliary workers are making full time hours, pay them. I am piecing together enough hours with [specific development] to make a survivable living. I think if the City made positions for workers full time permanent, it would make a difference.”
- “Poverty makes it hard to be presentable for a job.”
- “Volunteers that are peers can’t be expected to work for free or low wages.”
- “I can’t find a job with everything on computers. I got help doing a resume but if I can’t use computers so well no one will hire me.”
- “I went through the free job programs but employers find out you are in that program they don’t take you because they think you aren’t serious about working.”
- “Volunteering only makes sense if you are already settled otherwise it is used as a cheap labour/ sweatshop program down here.”
- “Discrimination is everywhere but particularly in the work environment that create uncomfortable work environments because the color of our skin.”
- “To see Black educators in positive roles (as teachers, professors etc.) would inspire potential for kids to feel like they belong.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding employment and education included:

- “VEC (Vancouver Economic Commission) should be integrated. Challenges for everyone to hire people. How can we use that as an opportunity to create new jobs for people. VEC are they publically funded? Well if the City has adopted these strategies they need to hold that hammer over VEC to have indicators of success to show how they are meeting the strategy goals.”
- “Adult programs like a pre-employment job training programs.”
- “More adult + family pre-employment programs.”
- “Access to education for people living in poverty that aren’t loans, it should be free.”
- “Have access to get dental work so I can improve my employment possibilities.”
- “More training for high-paying jobs not just casual labour programs.”
- “Easier access to resources to get my driver’s license and businesses started.”
- “To be able to make more money without social services deducting from my disability check each month.”
- “Employers are trying to find employees and employees can’t find employers. Need better matching. Employment – daily employment agency.”
- “Working cell phone for jobs/ downtown.”
- “Advocate for volunteer supplement program (income supplement for those on income assistance documenting volunteer work).”
- “Doors opened for Black people to get good jobs. Employment standards connect vulnerable people to services they need.”
- “We need to provide scholarships for our people. We need to find ways we can develop programs that address the needs of our community. Very often when these programs are offered they are facilitated by people who don’t understand Black culture and it becomes difficult for the trainer to adequately help the learner. We have resources in the Black community who can provide adequate services. Unfortunately, most of these people cannot find work in their field. They end up working driving cabs, working as security guards. We can do better.”

10. Food

Common topics: *social assistance; health; housing; cost of living; transportation; safety; accessible information and processes; racism/discrimination*

Food security was a common issue connected with many other lived experiences of poverty. Access to fresh and healthy food was identified as a major issue, with restrictive food bank policies, long lineups and limited transportation cited as major impediments. Families are forced to make impossible choices between paying rent and bills and buying nutritious food. As described in detail in the theme “cycles and traps,” difficulty accessing food can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion which can lead to less healthy coping mechanisms. These vicious cycles result in family disintegration which sustains oppressive systems of poverty.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of food:

- “Food – few and restrictive food banks. Can only register once every 12 months. Smaller food banks every week. Food access a big issue.”
- “Used to have food access support in Raycam – gone now.”
- “Food security – as a Sole Food farmer and at the farmers market - Produce being brought back to the farms, being thrown out, there’s so much food that’s not getting to people.”
- “Overabundance of coffee shops and bars” “Too many upscale, organic, vegan, unaffordable stores”
- “Physical problem of bringing food back with kids/babies.”
- “Prices for groceries are too high. Far too high.”
- “It is impossible to eat well on poverty wages. I almost never eat fruits and vegetables or protein. I feel so lucky whenever I get an apple or orange.”
- “The downtown eastside is a food desert. There is food everywhere but it isn’t healthy food and some places serve expired food.”
- “On welfare cheque day, all the stores down here put their prices up a few bucks.” “There are not enough sales on welfare cheque week.”
- “I go binning because I live in poverty but more and more places lock their bins and waste all that food just so poor people don’t go binning.”
- “Healthy and nutritious food is so important to recovery. The Foodbank has long lines in difficult locations in the city. We have to put our strollers and then our food on the bus. Often we get expired food and we can’t go back to return.”
- “I have a number of food sensitivities/allergies and can’t afford the specific foods and supplements I really need when I get \$130/month.”
- “Food security affects people of color,” “In Toronto Black people are disproportionately affected by food security,” “Communities were exploited and would grow food and it would be sent off to white communities.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding food included:

- “All free food should be designed to contribute to a diet that provides 100% RDA of all essential nutrients.”

- “Food distribution to each child in form of what majority eats.”
- “We need healthier food options. Fresh produce and protein, with distributions across the city.”
- “[Need] family based community kitchen.”
- “Access to grocery stores at night.”
- “More real not processed food.”
- “More community gardens so we can grow our own food.”
- “Subsidize a seniors supermarket so it’s cheaper and more options to buy own groceries”
- “Regulate food prices.”
- “More access to free water sources 24-7.”
- “The year before they were bringing food to the Pigeon Park market and gave it away. People were shocked! People didn’t know what they had. They had some awkward looking fruits. Prickly pear, etc. Need to educate people on different foods. Need to know how to use kitchens – lots of people used to fast food, etc. so can’t cook properly.”

11. Indigenous Experiences

Common topics: *safety; accessible information and processes; social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; amenities/leisure; childcare; racism/discrimination*

The experiences of Indigenous participants who contributed to this engagement report illustrate the barriers faced by many systemically excluded groups in the city. These experiences include discrimination when taking transit and accessing housing, lack of access to employment opportunities, struggles with child and youth apprehension that compound experiences of poverty, and lack of culturally appropriate services and activities. The City is working closely with the Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Executive Council to better understand poverty reduction from an Indigenous perspective, specifically as a discussion focused on well-being and supporting resiliency.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of reconciliation:

- “My biggest barrier is to find full time employment. I have education but being visible Indigenous makes it difficult.”
- “I have worked on getting into a job at []. I didn’t realize it was a temporary project. I made it off welfare. I am now almost finished this project. It felt like tokenism, bring an Indigenous person in temporarily and then call ourselves the City of Reconciliation. This is not reconciliation – it actually harms me because I was making too much money to be on welfare, then program finishes and then what?”
- “Safer streets for Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee get our native children out of the system. That’s residential school all over again. They are stealing our children.”
- “Native people being poor on our own land is genocide. It’s apartheid. Poverty is because they took our land and stole our babies. They will keep us in poverty until we get our land back.”
- “Hard to find housing. They discriminate because I am Native and live in the Downtown Eastside. As soon as they see my face, they won’t rent to me so I have to live in the hood.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding reconciliation included:

- “More services for men and teenage kids in care – want our first nation kids back home.”
- “Own our own native buildings run by our own people. Culture is important to us.”

- “More pow wows in the lower mainland.”
- “Start native teachings in schools. The right way, by native Elders.”
- “City can have more accessible family BBQ’s for first nations only as we tend to get left out.”
- “Need an Elders’ residence for Indigenous seniors with cultural supports/activities, recreation.”
- “Need more services targeted specifically at Indigenous community members.”

Highlight Story

I was homeless for two years up until 5 months ago. I now reside in an SRO. A day in my life is pretty stressful. It is a constant struggle for day to day necessities. After my half of the rent is paid I am left with \$300 per month, now if I do my laundry, buy some food and toiletries I am left with less than zero. I can’t afford any transportation. I can’t afford the few items I need to be able to look for work.

The Ministry want proof of employment before they will help pay for only part of the items you need. As a person in trades I need... a tool belt with a select few tools, hard hat and high visibility vest to start – and that’s out of reach. I am set up to fail right from the start.

I am in a relationship with a beautiful woman who I love dearly and I can’t even afford to take out to a movie or dinner. If I am lucky I can take her out for a free dinner at a shelter or a religious organization. I can only feed myself once a day if I am lucky. All my clothes are from donations because I can’t afford. I had to get a crisis grant just to get underwear for myself. It cost me more money to live than I receive. The list of barriers is so long to be able to better my life is so great that first seems hopeless to be all ... any kind of a so called normal life. I sometimes wish I don’t have to wake up every day because it costs money to just breathe. Money I don’t have and money I won’t be able to obtain.

We are punished on a daily basis for being in a situation or position and want out of so bad. It just seems pointless and hopeless to even have a dream of something better for myself and the beautiful woman in my life. Just to have the fundamentals, then to get a job would be great. – Listening Session Participant

12. Health

Common topics: *social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; accessible information and processes; safety; employment/education; food; cycles and traps; amenities/leisure; racism/discrimination*

Many people spoke of being unable to afford healthcare not covered by MSP, such as prescriptions, supplements, and dental care. Some talked about the stigma and shame they feel not being able to access dental care which impacts their self-esteem and makes it difficult to obtain employment (see the following section “Addiction” for more on this). Living in poverty limits people’s access to fresh and healthy foods, impacting physical and emotional health and well-being. It is difficult for many people in the City to find family doctors, and for Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S, and Black and People of Colour, it is further challenging to find safe, culturally-appropriate healthcare.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of health:

- “Not many doctors have the expertise to deal with government-sponsored refugees or transsexuals.”

- “Not enough family doctors especially doctors who don’t discriminate.”
- “Can’t find doctors who don’t speak languages other than English.”
- “Finding family doctors for families in low income neighbourhoods.”
- “I got no doctor for my kid.”
- “You are pushed to work when you are sick if you want to survive.”
- “Being able to afford fresh fruit and vegetables, being diabetic is hard to afford it and foodbanks are high carb food.”
- “My son is F.E.S. / F.A.S. has been living on the streets couch to couch for about 5 years, since his children were apprehended. Disability should be at the top of the list. Alcohol is a factor, in his life. He was living with me for 7-10 months off and on. More housing for single people.”
- “The smell of urine, feces, and bacteria is making people really sick down here.”
- “I don’t have enough money to eat proper food as a diabetic and I can’t afford to pay for supplements and prescriptions not covered by MSP. As a result, my weight is always fluctuating.”
- “I stop myself from buying the medicine I need because I have a limited budget.”
- “As a pensioner there have been many cutbacks in medications, in support workers. I can’t get coverage for the special bed I need.”
- “Stress and isolation has led to weight gain and health issues.”
- “Lots of people with no teeth who can’t eat proper food; lose your teeth, you lose your health.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding health included:

- “[Need] more doctors accepting new patients.”
- “Need a hub where you can pick up fresh groceries, menstrual supplies, sexual health resources, peer-run without stigma. A service hub.”
- “Acknowledging role of pets in wellness/recovery. Places for pets to stay while in recovery. Places for people to access therapeutic animals.”
- “It’s too hard to get on welfare and disability. There are too many rules. It shouldn’t be this hard to get on welfare.”
- “More prescription drugs need to be covered.”
- “Need culturally-relevant and multilingual health care.”
- “Extended coverage to include supplements, prescriptions, dental and eye.”
- “Need multidisciplinary first responder team to go out to overdose and other issues with housing support and mental health workers. Need holistic approach for intervention”
- “Need more places for people to use bathrooms instead of the alleys” “Should clean our eastside alley ways a lot more. They really are dirty and they smell bad.”
- “Alternative health professionals (homeopathic, holistic dentistry, alternative health procedures like Chinese and Japanese acupuncture), nutritionist, vitamins, Chinese herbal medicine, and functional medicine specialties should be covered.”
- “It would be great to have a translator at hospitals because our family sometimes does not have time to go with us.”
- “Care for his sister with vision impairment, would help to have care taker funding”
- “[Need] doctors who are holistic and full medical care.”
- “Need homecare but can’t afford to pay someone and no agency helps unless you can’t shower or dress by yourself.”

13. Addiction

Common themes: *health; safety; employment/education; housing; social assistance*

There is a province-wide need for more and better addiction care services, and this was heard throughout the engagement sessions. Poverty compounds feelings of depression and helplessness which leads to self-medication with drugs and alcohol. When people are ready to go into recovery, the beds are not always available or other barriers prevent them from accessing immediate services. Many programs and services are located in the Downtown Eastside, which makes it difficult to get away from the influences that keep people in their addictions.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of addiction:

- “Poverty leads to increased drug use for me. I feel more depressed and anxious and self-medicate. All around me, people are overdosing from drugs that are used as a coping mechanism.”
- “Much shame and stigma experienced by women who have lost teeth due to inadequate dental care. Many women in pain due to dental health, relapse from recovery especially hard when in pain, as substance use often aided with this pain. Can’t pay for expensive dentures, so often have missing teeth. Need over the counter medication for pain.”
- “I wish I could get into detox the days I decide to go in. It’s already hard to get clean and when we decide to, there is nothing there for us. There has to be something right away.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding addiction included:

- “Detox that’s not in DTES”
- “Detox not downtown Vancouver.”
- “With the opioid crisis – poisoning – support more peer driven services and programs e.g. Pace Society, WISH.”
- “Acknowledging role of pets in wellness/recovery. Places for pets to stay while in recovery. Places for people to access therapeutic animals.”
- “More detox including tobacco.”
- “Teach meditation and stress reduction techniques to all (without religious dogma).”
- “More follow-up after six week treatment for addiction.”
- “More treatment centres for people with addictions.”
- “More help for free drugs.”

Highlight Story

I ended up being homeless for over 1 year because I had lost my children (social [services] had taken them). My income assistance cheque had deductions and my rent had just gotten raised – they tried to give me a little extra but I still did not even have enough to pay my old rent so....Because my buildings manager had seen this problem before they figured I would not be able to ever catch up with my rent so I got evicted. I ended up losing my place which made it seem impossible to fight for my kids. I ended up slipping into depression again – then I ended up relapsing, which then added to my depression. I soon realized that I couldn’t see my kids while I was like this. I slipped even deeper into my depression. I feel so incomplete without my children. If my kids were never taken, I would have been able to work out the small problems I was having with my young parent support worker. However living down here I cannot afford to eat every day or even do my laundry on a regular basis. I can’t afford to see my family doctor because I have to take a bus to go and see him. The building I’m living in has shared toilettes and showers room. We have a mouse and rat, cockroach and bed bug problem. My legs look like I pick at them but it’s actually from bedbug bites. Things definitely need to change for the better down here! We need more help! – Listening Session Participant

14. Mental Health

Common topics: *social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; accessible information and processes; safety; employment/education; food; cycles and traps; amenities/leisure*

Living in poverty creates stress for families and individuals that impacts health and well-being, as well as the ability to function on a day-to-day basis. Participants worried about whether they could afford healthy food for their families and keep a roof over their heads causing stress and tension in the home and further impacting mental health and well-being. Lack of access to counselling supports and services is wide-spread. Some participants identified the need for an integrated approach to mental health that recognizes the multiple and complex needs of people with lived experiences of poverty.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of mental health:

- “PTSD from constant stress every day of poverty! Kids too.”
- “One of the things we don’t talk about poverty is the effects of it on our health due to stress and anguish for not being able to feed your kids, when society and the system considers you inadequate, rootless because you cannot speak the language, society discriminates you because of your skin color, your religion, etc.”
- “Where do people go who have been labelled ‘violent’ for simply yelling.”
- “Can only get one hour per month of group counseling at Mosaic and no one-on-one counseling.”
- “Family stress is my main issue living in poverty. I stress about affording things which stresses my family and I get short-tempered and skip meals which also comes out on my family.”
- “Something needs to be done about all the crazy people wandering around downtown. When Riverview mental home was shut down, many of its patients were literally driven downtown and dumped in front of a welfare office. Many of them are simply unable to care for themselves. Something needs to be done to provide them with more help, resources, care.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding mental health included:

- “Reinstate mental institutions.”
- “We need art therapy and art classes.”
- “Free access to counseling.”
- “Wrap-around health care supports including mental health and detox on demand.”
- “Government should find a way to help the kids, we need counselling for the kids, most kids are struggling with mental health which they never experienced before.”
- “Stronger mental health support systems for immigrant groups.”

15. Housing and utilities

Common topics: *social assistance; cost of living; transportation; childcare; accessible information and processes; safety; employment/education; food; cycles and traps; amenities/leisure; racism/discrimination*

Housing was a major issue for many participants in this engagement process. For those living in poverty, finding safe, clean and affordable housing in the City is a major challenge. Participants described how landlords discriminate against those on income assistance (see also the Youth section), against families with children (particularly single mothers), and Indigenous and Black people, as well as the constant threat of evictions. Many talked about the need for housing where they can feel safe and that is free of pests, molds and other toxins, a place with their own bathroom and kitchen where they can prepare healthy meals. Housing was clearly linked to many other issues, particularly health, safety, employment/education, food security and dignity/stigma.

Securing housing in a limited rental market like Vancouver is made even more challenging by the lack of dignity afforded people with lived experiences of poverty. Getting rid of slumlords and initiating rent controls were mentioned as solutions to the housing crisis. Many people connected clean, safe, affordable housing with food security, better physical and emotional health, better access to employment and a better overall quality of life.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of housing:

- “Housing is a big issue here. When you want to get a house it’s way more than marrying someone. Who you are, where do you work, they want banking information, references, background check, previous landlord, friends to talk to... but if they don’t like you... They’re checking you out. It’s like they want to marry you or have a relationship with you... My partner didn’t even ask me for these things when we got together.”
- “Landlord did not believe that he could pay because he only has a part time job and was also trying to raise the cost of the place higher than what was advertised on the internet.”
- “The housing that is available for people with families and babies, but not for single or unmarried people. They didn’t have good relationship with previous landlord so was unable to get a reference. Found a friend who signed up with her and claimed to be on the lease – because she had a job was able to get through the system.”
- “Rent hikes too much.”
- “I am a single mother and I don’t have a decent home – the cheap housing options are old, dirty washrooms, homes that make me sick.”
- “Some of the homes I look at DO NOT accept babies. Landlords DO NOT want to rent to families. I tried to help a family to find housing. When we went to see a house the landlord told us ‘We accept pets but no kids.’”
- “This is a big barrier for us – there are some people that have lost their home because they don’t understand paperwork. This happened to one of our members who was kicked out of a BC Housing house because he couldn’t read or speak English. Now he has to live in a shelter.”
- “Landlords make you feel you don’t have rights to housing. If you are lucky to rent a house, they make you feel you have no rights over the space you live in.”
- “Wrongful evictions, RTA violations. Hotel evictions and they don’t help them find housing; (housing provider) takes over. Control on landlords illegal evictions.”
- “Subsidized housing so old + derelict worn out.”
- “I currently live in social housing of which barely afford. I work basically for my rent and to offset my day. I volunteer eight times a month for a small stipend that I give to my dad – we live together in order to split rent that is \$1000/month. Vend on weekends to off-set. Don’t make much but helps.”

- “To see less homeless, more affordable housing without costing your whole welfare cheque. Where you are able to buy food, have cable. So you don’t have to share washrooms because some people don’t care how they leave a washroom; users leave needles, blood, dirty tissues behind.”
- “Having to do cut backs on a lot of things, on groceries, hydro gas needs to be lowered.”
- “[Housing provider] is making me pay \$580 for a broken window I didn’t break. At \$50 a month I can’t afford it on my income. I got an eviction notice because I don’t want to pay.”
- “Not enough shelters where couples can stay together.”
- “I hope to find affordable housing with my own bathroom and my own kitchen with a stove so I can eat better for my health and live longer.”
- “The mayor promised housing and the African Centre but 3 years on nothing has happened.”
- “The landlord will take your money and damage deposit, end of the month they evict you and not give you the damage deposit”, I was evicted in five places in four months and they don’t tell me why, they gave me rent and no damage deposit. There is no time to challenge the landlords because we have families to feed.”
- “To be Black and looking for a place to live is much harder in this city. It’s not affordable. One time I called a place and the landlady told me to come over, and then when I got there she didn’t open the door.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding housing included:

- “Need for pest-free housing.”
- “More attention on people running the hotels.”
- “I’m sure the City could build some more low income housing instead of spending money on those filthy noisy, smelly SROs. I’m sure if the City could get rid of the slum landlords and the slum housing they run, it would start people thinking a lot better about their living situation; also about themselves, which would make some big improvements in the whole downtown eastside in Vancouver.”
- “Also would like to have my own kitchen and bathroom in my home. The City could make it better if they could place a person family in a decent home by not letting them live in a SRO place for more than 3 months, then putting them in a once bedroom or a bachelor suite which has their own bathroom and kitchen. No mice or bugs or cockroaches.”
- “Rent should be controlled so it’s not always going up or being evicted by landlords who want to raise the rent.”
- “Supportive housing and BC housing and Native housing should be covered by the law so that rents don’t go up when social assistance goes up and so they don’t have arbitrary rules like no guests.”
- “We need housing everywhere not just in the Downtown Eastside. We should have the options to live in other neighbourhoods.”
- “Mixed housing is needed. Not enough learning when it’s all the poor. He had the worst habits and didn’t know until he lived near others who weren’t low-income. This also helps people be less judgmental.”

16. Law Enforcement

Common topics: social assistance; housing; cost of living; safety; employment/education; racism/discrimination

Some participants in the listening sessions made clear that relationships between police and people living in poverty are not good. Some people feel harassed by police simply for living in poverty while others feel targeted for living in certain areas and trying to make a living at the Downtown Eastside street market. Indigenous peoples, Black people and people of colour described experiences of racism in police interactions which further stigmatizes poverty. Homeless people and youth also felt targeted as they often struggle to keep what few belongings they have when those belongings are targeted for removal from public spaces.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of law enforcement:

- “People in poverty feel criminalized.”
- “Shoplifting and survival is violently criminalized.”
- “Person with warrants: difficult to deal with challenges without having income.”
- “I feel safer on Hastings than on Granville.”
- “Respect the people that move in. I was totally disrespected. They dumped my belongings into garbage bags. I had trays of beads dumped into garbage.”
- “Surprisingly, many people called for more policing in the DTES, although others complained of the police forcing much of street action / drug trade off of Hastings Street west of Main St. into the back alleys. While this may reduce visibility of the City’s problems to tourists, it only makes life even more dangerous for residents. Also it is almost universally felt by Natives that the police are racist. They feel that this problem can only be solved by hiring more Aboriginal officers. Also, police are not mental health workers.”
- “The first time I was stopped by police I saw them coming towards us and I wanted to just keep walking my friend stopped and to talk to them but I kept walking. One of the cops followed me shoving my arm up my back and pushed me against the wall. They tried to tell me I was selling drugs because I had money in my pocket.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding law enforcement included:

- “[Indigenous people] feel that this problem can only be solved by hiring more Aboriginal officers.”
- “Police stop hitting and stealing merchandise from homeless.”
- “Plus we don’t need five cop cars on one block for hours at a time harassing people and hitting them!!!”
- “Police should stop harassing people in the eastside market by taking the property away from them because they don’t produce a receipt without giving them some sort of paper stating that they have taken someone’s property from them.”
- “We want the police to come and have a sit down with people of the Black community to talk and have a one on one relationship with the people of the community so that they are not strangers. We want a generalized council made up of people from each community who meet and report back to the communities.”

17. New Canadians/Refugees

Common topics: social assistance; housing; cost of living; employment/education; accessible information and services; transportation; childcare; transition; health; law enforcement; amenities/leisure; racism/discrimination

For people new to Canada, and others who have been here for some time, there are particular challenges adapting to a new social, cultural and political context. Some people spoke of the isolation they feel trying to break into social circles, access employment opportunities, build language skills, and find suitable housing. For those without documentation, such as a permanent resident card, it is very difficult to access programs and services contributing to a cycle of poverty.

Participants described a lack of support, particularly language supports, in helping them get on their feet. While many new Canadians have credentials in their home countries, these credentials are not accepted in Canada, limiting the kinds of jobs they can access. Many newcomers express frustration at the systemic discrimination they feel prevents them from moving forward and which keeps them living in poverty.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of new Canadians and refugees:

- “A refugee had a pain in his knee and there was fluid in his knee. He paid from his pocket for the surgery. If he didn’t have the job he wouldn’t have survived. He has to travel to Richmond every day for his work. Couldn’t get MSP for first 6 months. Still on probation period.”
- “It’s not true that people who come as part of the government program don’t have problems. The government pays for you to come to Canada. But she does not have her PR card and can’t work or study and now the government wants her to pay back the transportation costs.”
- [participant is showing a drawing] “I drew an English speaking woman with a purse full of money and a non-English speaking woman with an empty purse. There is a lot of discrimination here if you don’t speak English, we are verbally abused if we cannot speak the language. If you don’t speak the language, you don’t have work or money. If you don’t work, you don’t have money and therefore you are poor.”
- “The government do not allow us to study and get an education, so we stay in a cycle of poverty...I don’t have access to basic services if I don’t have PR or Citizenship, even though my kids have citizenship – the government is making my kids to leave in poverty. I want to study but I am not allowed. If you don’t have status and even if you kids have status, they are not allowed to get an education here.”
- “I have a baby who was born here and is a Canadian citizen. I divorced the father of my baby who is also a Canadian citizen but I am not. My request for child support was denied because I am not Canadian or PR (permanent resident). The Judge at the hearing told me “You wanted to get pregnant, it is your problem.”
- “Jobs are the same way – they want to see a work permit or visa. Don’t believe them that they’re refugees.”
- “IFH – Interim Federal Health – They take a long time to give permission to pharmacy and dentist.”
- “Immigrant and refugee services are isolated from the neighborhoods – not provided in the neighborhood houses or community centers. Not available in place.”
- “Tired of being treated as a second-hand citizen because of my Afghan race.”
- “Being in Canada for 20 years and today I am a homeless person. I could picture myself in this stage and age. I could have been a successful person with wife and kids and business and own house.”
- “I don’t have a Canadian birth certificate or Canadian ID, which is a huge obstacle for accessing any social services. I can’t get BC housing or welfare or anything.”
- “I am immigrant and if I want to sponsor my family, I can’t go on social assistance and they can’t go on social assistance. This isn’t right.”

- “Employers tell me I need better English skills, how do I pay for that while on welfare.”
- “The government does not provide additional resource or have training to create more connections that help make the naturalization process easier.”
- [Name] (moved here at age 12) the culture that she was used to, regardless of the time of day, was more interactive whereas in Vancouver (first year in particular) depending on the situation (e.g. fleeing violence) you are ‘alone’ in the sense that you feel to be the only one who feels isolated.”

Recommendations participants made regarding new Canadians and refugees included:

- “Need to get services into the centers or have advocates there to get those services for them.”
- “Funding for Black-centred events.”
- “Places to find out assets (e.g. legal aid).”

18. LGBTQ2S/TGV2S

Common topics: social assistance; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; transition; safety; accessible information and services; law enforcement; health; food; newly arrive immigrants; First Nations/Reconciliation; seniors; racism/discrimination

The engagement process attempted to capture diverse voices and experiences within the City. Listening sessions captured a number of reflections from LGBTQ2S participants. Many of their experiences intersect with other themes, including difficulty in finding safe and affordable housing, securing employment, finding healthcare that is responsive to the unique health needs of LGBTQ2S people, and feeling safe and respected regardless of their gender identity.



Participants made these comments relevant to the issue of LGBTQ2S:

- “Case workers and medical staff aren’t trained effectively on specific issues facing LGBTQ2S people.”
- “Housing really is her concern because you need to be sharing the space. One of the challenges is you have to adapt to the lifestyles of the people you live with. She identifies as a trans woman

not a transsexual or transvestite, which means that she has her own identity and it might not be understood. ‘Forced’ to live with people that don’t agree with your lifestyle because houses need to be shared.”

- “Very successful as a gay refugee claimant here. Very accepted. However there is bi-phobia here. More bi-phobia here than homophobia.... Also has experienced judgements because of identifying as pan sexual. Has problems with straight people – very hard to explain it to them. They can’t digest it. Must fit the people into categories and it’s frustrating. I want to be a man sometimes, I want to be a woman sometimes, I want to be gay sometimes, I want to be bi sometimes, and they can’t understand it... All they understand is L and G, but they can’t understand B, T, +, +. +...”
- “There is also the issue of intersectionality- being Black, being a muslim and being gay and living with HIV.”

Highlight Story

Housing really is my concern because you need to be sharing the space. One of the challenges is you have to adapt to the lifestyles of the people you live with. I identify as a trans woman not a transsexual or transvestite, which means that I have my own identity and it might not be understood. It is not a problem of poverty, it is the reality you have to face of being yourself. Being free. Based on my experience, they prescribed medicine without the right follow-up. The medical needs for trans people are very different. Right now I don’t have access to health care and when I get sick I have insurance from the government for one year, but it is not recognized in all hospitals or pharmacies. Not many doctors have the expertise to deal with government-sponsored refugees or transsexual.

Problem with rent – people who just came to Canada don’t have references – Same with a job or wherever you go. Very difficult for me. Two important factors – people who come as part of the government program, and people who make the refugee claims in Canada. It’s not true that people who come as part of the government program don’t have problems. The government pays for you to come to Canada. But I do not have my PR card and can’t work or study and now the government wants me to pay back the transportation costs. It can be very different for example, as coming as a part of a government program, I can’t study and can’t work. I also had problems with my social worker. Four people sharing bathroom in same place. Roommates in houses – too many people in their houses. In Vancouver there are rights that come from the government which is good, but there is not enough protection for transsexuals because the society of Vancouver has not progressed as far as the rights. Trans people are human. Why aren’t they treating them better? Currently there are no trans-specific housing for trans refugees. Really need housing for trans folks. – Listening Session Participant

19. Safety

Common topics: law enforcement; accessible information and services; health; housing; social assistance; First Nations/Reconciliation; racism/discrimination

Safety was a key topic for participants living in the Downtown Eastside though people in other parts of the City also pointed to feeling a lack of safety, for example in interactions with members of the Vancouver Police Department and Transit Police. Violence and crime are daily experiences for many people with lived experiences of poverty, with women feeling especially vulnerable to harassment and solicitation.

People spoke about how difficult it is to move out of neighbourhoods that don't feel safe. Without alternatives to SROs and shelters, people find themselves with little choice but to stay in places that create further stress and tension and make getting out of poverty even more difficult.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to the issue of safety:

- "There is violence everywhere –domestic violence, violence in shelters, violence in SROs, violence on street. Everywhere I am surrounded by violence."
- "I face more violence from others in poverty. More muggings and violence against seniors and disabled people."
- "My home needs more safety."
- "Nighttime - safety on buses, walking on the street, being solicited for sex."
- "I feel somewhat safe, but there are prostitutes and pimps in front of my building all day and night"
- "Community Centres are not around the clock and early morning the worst things happen."
- "Staying safe in the area is also a challenge because the police just don't care about the area."
- "Safe for DTES not high income out of area here to party."
- "People steal my money while I sleep."
- "Women are more vulnerable to attacks by men."
- "Susceptible to rape."
- "Being Aboriginal in the DTES makes us targets."
- "There's a document that is symbolic – map of emergency shelters – one shelter in every local area (22) and in every case it's a community center except DTES – in DTES it's Oppenheimer Park where tents can be provided. Everywhere else you can go into a building that is seismically sound, but in this community you'll be outside in tents. Fundamentally wrong! Morally wrong! Such an explicit indicator of fundamental inequity."

Recommendations that participants made regarding safety included:

- "Need more lighting in most areas. Need more security and their dogs."
- "Emergency button for Elders."
- "More block watch in the DTES."
- "Stop the street city cleaners from being assholes to the homeless. We don't need five city cleaners with five trucks on one block."
- "Maintain/support women-only spaces."
- "I would like to see a lot more done in the line of policing the eastside. I really do not feel very safe down here, because there are too many people down here carrying bear mace, or some sort of a weapon so they can rob or hurt somebody and not too much is being done about that."
- "Fix sidewalks so people with walkers don't do headers over cracks."
- "Need police force that has better training (anti-racism/mental health/cultural safety); hire more Aboriginal officers."

20. Seniors and Elders

Common topics: social assistance; employment/education; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare [often grandchildren]; accessible information and services; health; racism/discrimination

While community-based seniors centres are making a difference in the lives of Vancouver seniors, too many are facing food and housing insecurity, isolation, loneliness, inability to pay expensive medical bills, and difficulties finding out about available programs and services. Participants reported differences among different age groups, with younger seniors who may be working or unable to work facing a precarious future with limited resource and shelter options.

As with many other themes, housing was a significant concern for seniors, both for those who own houses as well as those who rent. Participants described family members and friends who have become homeless due to renovictions and it remains a pressing concern for many seniors in the City.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to seniors:

- “All of us are in fear of losing our housing, becoming homeless, renovicted, not using the housing because of stairs; for seniors, housing is one of the most crucial issues.”
- “I depend economically from my children, I am a burden to them...Sometimes we face abuse from our families; sometimes our kids don’t have patience to help.”
- “If you are a senior who lives alone, who can help you to clean the apartment? Where do we get help for things we can’t do anymore? You need a letter from a doctor stating you need help to clean your house. Her husband is disabled and she went to her family doctor and he authorizes the service. A social worker also visits you to confirm the information and then they (Government?) can send someone to help you to clean, make food, do laundry, etc. This help is not easy to get, there is a lot of investigation before they authorize the service, it takes a lot of time There are applications that need to be completed online. If you don’t know how to use a computer or you don’t have anyone to help you, it is difficult to get what you need.”
- “Handydart service is good; it helps a lot for seniors that need transportation. You can access this service depending on your age and health situation.”
- “Lots of elderly Chinese seniors are very vulnerable at the Carnegie. Especially the language barrier. They are not included usually in these types of sessions. Have needs especially around personal safety and access.”
- “Talking about senior and I’m looking at the group that’s not quite seniors but will be soon; large group of women who have very poor health and not able to fully work but don’t qualify for disability; numbers are growing and they’re very poor; they’ll be seniors within 5-10 years; some are gay/lesbian, some have other kinds of difficulties, intelligence problems, can’t get regular jobs; what bothers me is that there isn’t anything for them.”
- “Have a neighbour who is 91 and living independently; she was perfectly fine until she broke her hip and now she’s in her apartment alone and the access she has to social isolation, taking the bus, even the handy dart, a lot of things come into play – equipment is an issue – she hasn’t been able to make it to the bank; lots of things come into play when you’re that much older.”
- “Housing – demoevictions, what happens to seniors? There’s no place for seniors to rent anywhere, there’s nothing; what happens to their pensions when they’re put on the street, no pensions, no income, you need an address, if they have no family, what happens to them, where do they live, where do they eat? Left on the street to starve to death? Seniors need to know how to access this information.”

21. Things/Clothes/Etc.

Common topics: *social assistance; employment/education; housing; cost of living; transportation; childcare; health; accessible information and services; safety; amenities/leisure*

For those living on the street, in SROs, or social housing, something as simple as doing laundry can become a challenge. Participants talked about the need for readily available laundry and shower services, suggesting it could be made available through community centres. Some people talked about not having access to cheap or affordable stores because they can't afford the transit that could take them there. Accessing tools, socks, laundry, and other items is something most people take for granted. For many people in the listening sessions, these items are out of reach because they're not available in the neighbourhood and the costs to obtain them are prohibitive.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to things/clothes/etc.:

- "Difficult to access clothing for kids."
- "No shops of low income nearby."
- "I had to let go of many of belongings and things passed to me from my family because when I was homeless I could only have a small storage and what I could fit in my bag. I miss my stuff, I will never see or have some of those photos again."

Recommendations that participants made regarding things/clothes/etc. included:

- Need "access to bed bug sauna."
- Need "stroller/bike/transportation repair services."
- Need more "laundry and shower services." "Laundry available at community centres."
- "Communal makerspace, access to tools."
- "Make it easier for all to shop, more cheap stores for people on welfare."
- "Sock exchange."
- "DTES residents should get a local discount card for 20% for all the fancy new stores going up"
- "Programs to alter donations to sizes that work (teaching sewing skills in process, social enterprise possibility)."
- "Support street vending around clothing sales."
- "Temporary modular units must include laundry services for each unit/on each floor."
- "Potentially viable children's consignment store (social enterprise?)."

22. Gender Equity

Common topics: *safety; social assistance; housing; cost of living; health; transportation; childcare; employment/education; racism/discrimination; youth, seniors*

Several listening sessions focused specifically on women's issues. Many of those themes are found throughout this document. Safety, housing and childcare were topics that came up repeatedly throughout the listening sessions. Single mothers talked about how challenging it is to find and retain housing for their children, and when they're not able to provide food and other necessities, they risk losing their children rather than being provided the resources necessary to take care of them.

Women of colour and Indigenous women reported experiences of racism and discrimination that prevents them from securing housing and finding employment. Childcare is expensive and inaccessible making it difficult to work outside the home. Women want to feel safe and empowered in their neighbourhoods and communities and the comments throughout this report reflect that desire.

Participants made these comments relevant to women:

- “Moms stay at home while dad works - Canada could benefit if both parents work, you just need to provide what is needed for that – childcare.”
- “A woman who has kids is homeless and can’t get a job because she’s homeless, but can’t get a home because she can’t get a job. Now the kids have been taken because of her condition. If she doesn’t get it sorted out in three weeks she’ll have her kids taken away. She can get her life going again in Edmonton (car, home, etc.) but can’t leave without her kids.”
- “21% of homeless count was seniors; but no focus on seniors for housing; and senior women who are couch surfing.”
- “My mother had to go through the union to get a promotion because they overlooked her qualifications.”

Recommendations that participants made regarding women and gender equity included:

- “More programs to support women to be empowered when they leave violence.”
- “Safety – night time is very scary, lots of men stop and ask for sex.”
- “More 2nd stage homes for women leaving treatment.”
- “More safe places for women in the DTES / inner city. E.g. keep sister space – safe injection space open 24 hours/ day.”
- “Women’s Services outside DTES. Need safe washrooms, abstinence-based shelters, access to phones for women outside of the DTES.”

23. Youth

Common topics: *social assistance; accessible information and services; housing; employment / education; cost of living; transportation; childcare; amenities/leisure*

Some youth participants talked about the decline in youth services they have witnessed over the last few years, for example there are few if any organizations offering dusk to dawn services for youth. Youth in ministry care have few resources available to them when they “age out” of care, and this leads to difficulty pursuing education, finding housing and employment, and getting the kind of support that other young people have.

There is a need for more recreational and educational opportunities for youth, particularly in low income neighbourhoods and areas that lack safe outdoor parks and playgrounds. Participants also pointed to the need for low barrier programs and services that will prepare youth for employment, as well as supportive housing options that can be available to youth as they navigate complex systems.

Participants made these comments that seemed relevant to youth:

- This is a composite story based on comments from a service provider and a participant’s own words: It was more manageable in the West End in 2002. More services and supports back in

that day. Lots of funding cut since then. Doors shut in the morning sometimes. She's seen the fall of DERA (Downtown Eastside Residents Association) and lots of other organizations. She knew people who lived in the Murray and who lived in the Granville street hotels. She lived that life. 'I watched how my community crashed and my tribe crashed as well.' No safe space that is low-barrier to access for youth in Strathcona. Does have Raycam. There are barriers, but fairly low barrier. The youth need more supports. She had outreach workers to educate her on working with navigating the city. She wants to bring up youth behind her to sit where she sits someday. Bring back Dusk till Dawn. No services for those who age out of care – mid-adults need something to go into. 'Only band-aid solutions now and they're rotting away.'

- "Most people in care: 1) Have poor social skills, lack of experience in social interactions; lack of culture or tact; poor relationship skills (i.e. unable to work with a co-worker, employer, teachers). 2) Lack support and networks (i.e., parents, relatives, friends, mentors); lack role-models for social graces, etiquette, navigating through life/career; 3) find challenges sustaining a regimented lifestyle (i.e. waking up at 8am, cooking/meal preparation; 4) There is a status quo that people are well-adjusted, that they 'look good' and socially capable. There is a stigma towards people who do not fit this category; 5) Most suffer mental health issues (i.e. phobias, anxiety, Asperger's, OCD)"
- "I am a recent graduate coming out of care. Now I am new in the workforce I am realizing how limited my choices are even coming out of university. My post-secondary education experience has been limited to the arts even though I had assistance from []. Former Youth in Care tuition waived. It's hard to find employment with an arts degree. I am currently unemployed."

Recommendations that participants made regarding youth included:

- "More educational programs for kids."
- "Safer playgrounds for kids."
- "Make job opportunities plentiful and not scarce; organize community football leagues; hold jobs that exchange work for food."
- "Develop more programs tailored towards 19-30 with subsidies and services."
- "Assistance to academic resources and tutoring for youths in care and former youths in care especially for science and math areas."
- "Make more jobs, more housing, and especially more public kinds of things (parks)."
- "More affordable housing and waivers for programs for youth."

Highlight Story

I honestly dread leaving my house because transit has gotten to be the single place I feel completely unsafe. It is like being thrown into a lion's den with lions who have been starved and are waiting for the first person to happen chance upon them. Half the time I get to go for rides with my roommate, but we can't always afford gas money. We have been looking for a place the last few weeks and I will say it's daunting to have to do. One of my roommates works part time and her boyfriend is trying to get onto welfare, and I have PWD (Person With Disability designation). But even still we can only afford \$1500-\$1800 (with utilities probably separate), which leaves us with almost nothing for food. Looking on Craigslist is kind of a low-level joke to me, I say that because of what happens on there. I thought when listing they weren't supposed to specifically ask for this group of people (i.e. this place is for a student or full-time working single person with no one allowed over.) It isn't like we do much more than play video games, listen to music, but the moment they hear we smoke, they lose interest, or they hear we don't all work and have government money coming in always. Let's go back to cost though; between the three of us our ideal rent is \$500 a piece, but I only get \$375 from PWD and he doesn't have welfare yet, she works enough that we could both split costs but we'd barely make ends meet. How can welfare PWD give us only \$375 when the cost for housing is average \$1200. – Listening Session Participant

Conclusion

As part of an equity-informed approach that is rooted in the social determinants of health, it is important that these stories contribute to an ongoing process of better understanding how people with lived experiences of poverty are experiencing life in Vancouver. Recommendations that emerge from these stories will be considered within a system-wide context and inform decision-making on a day-to-day basis. The rich data gathered through listening sessions and active participation by Poverty Action Advisory Committee members will guide recommendations in partnership with community, and with a view towards systems change. Together with the City's diverse range of partners, we can continue to work to reduce and eliminate the range of structural and systemic barriers, racism, and stigmatization of poverty that contribute to the injustices and exhausting frustrations experienced by far too many friends, family and neighbours in Vancouver.

The City of Vancouver has never had a formal poverty reduction strategy. PAAC participants have encouraged Vancouver to “be bold” in creating a strategy for Vancouver. Being bold may take more than funding a collection of projects or programs, being bold may be about working together across departments and with external partners to support an institutional and cultural shift in the way the City serves communities, strategically invests, meaningfully engages, and how it measures success.

We hope this report honours the stories shared by participants and leads to appropriate and relevant actions being taken to actualize the equitable outcomes so passionately advocated for by all participants in this process. In 2019, leading up to the finalization of the proposed strategy, City staff will continue engaging with Vancouverites. We will also further consider the ways in which the actions of senior governments can be complimented and strategically leveraged so that the actions the City of Vancouver commits to in 2019 create a positive and lasting legacy that is meaningful to the everyday lives of Vancouverites today and in the future.

Appendix A- Poverty Action Advisory Committee - Invited Members

Organization	Name
30Network	Veronika Bylicki
411 Seniors	Leslie Remund
Academic – BC Centre for Substance Use	Lindsay Richardson
Childcare	Sharon Gregson
Canadian Mental Health Association	Michael Anhorn
Disability Association	Jane Dyson
Exchange Inner City/EMBERS/Urban Core	Johanna Li
First Call/Single Mom's Alliance	Viveca Ellis
Food Bank	Aart Schuurman-Hess
Homelessness Services Association of BC	Celine Mauboules
Mayor's Working Group on Immigration/AMSSA	Farah Kotadia
Hogan's Alley Society	Stephanie Allen
Multi-Agency Partnership	Saleem (MOSAIC)
Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council	Kevin Barlow
Association of Neighbourhood Houses	Deb Bryant
Parks & Recreation	Donnie Rosa / **Jessica Land
PHS Pigeon Park Savings	Kevin Grant
Carnegie Community Action Project	Phoenix Winters (CCAP)
PWLE Advisory - Mental Health and Addictions	Shelda Kastor (WAHRS), Alex O'Donaghey, Nova (Raycam)
Sanctuary Health/Watari	Byron Cruz/Ingrid Mendez
Vancity	Catherine Ludgate
Vancouver Food Policy Council	Jesse Veentra
Vancouver Friendship Centre	Susan Tatoosh
Vancouver School Board	Jody Langlois
VCH Public Health	Juan Solarzano
WISH/DTES Women's Coalition	Mebrat Beyene and Alice Kendall
VCH Food Policy - PWLE	Racheal McKendry, Monica Coll
Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction	Dave Jagpal
Vancouver Coastal Health - Strategy Deployment	Natasha Golbeck
DTES Market	Constance Barnes
No One's Illegal	Harsha Walia
North Hastings BIA	Patricia Barnes
Urban Native Youth Association	Dena Klachinsky
Pacific Community Resources Society	Amanee Elchehimi (Pathways to Education)
Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction	Marisa Pelletier
Union Gospel Mission	Bobby MacDonald
Red Fox Healthy Living Society	Emma Sutherland
Coalition of Child Care Advocates	Rita Chudnovsky

Appendix B – Poverty Action Advisory Committee Feedback

The PAAC emphasized that a municipal poverty reduction strategy has to use clear and accessible language, specifically in how it defines poverty, be strengths-based, and should measure success through accountability to the community. Other recommendations include:

- The City needs to balance long-term actions with short-term (quick start) actions
- There is an urgency to act NOW
- The City has an important role to play in advocating around income - be innovative (think beyond social enterprise) while addressing inequality and social exclusion at the same time
- Connect City strategy with provincial and federal poverty reduction strategies
- Need City to be transparent and accountable including engagement methodology
- Think about wealth distribution and how corporations can contribute to poverty reduction through hiring process, charitable contributions, taxation
- Reframe poverty reduction actions, e.g., access to affordable childcare, and celebrate investments into housing/childcare/services as investments in health
- Improved access to city services by Indigenous peoples is reconciliation in action
- Create guiding principles as a way to guide the work and create a shared frame of understanding for poverty reduction
- Create safe spaces in the city for people who have been systemically excluded, including exclusion of Black community and intersectional approach to engagement
- Dedicate resources and time into creating and supporting real diversity. One PAAC member said the “police board has [...] no single parents; impossible for full-time single working mom to have time to sit on that board; there’s a commitment to diversity but it’s not actually possible.”
- Ensure support for children and families: coordinate support/ services with Province, BC Housing
- Provide free transit for mothers and youth; copy City of Calgary’s low income sliding scale transit pass (quick starts in this area are key)
- Restore dignity by reducing need to stand in long line-ups
- Provide safe spaces for women to get away from constant threat of violence on the street and in unsafe places
- The City needs to take responsibility for the police (VPD and transit police) to ensure people are not unfairly targeted (racial profiling, homeless, youth); need for better training and address the disconnect between what is said and what happens on the street
- Don’t filter out the stories of people with lived experiences of poverty; act on the recommendations and reflect in the City’s work what is actually being said
- Remove barriers to civic participation
- Importance of worker cooperatives; create opportunities that move beyond a capitalist model
- Create strong supports for social hiring (e.g., help with resume, interview skills, appropriate clothes, etc.) and recognize importance of lived experience (not just education credentials)
- Build social housing, co-housing, market housing; be bold, innovative and target people across the spectrum of needs
- Access to technology is vital (access government forms/applications/etc.)
- Need fresh, healthy food; increase funding from social policy grants for food programs
- Should not have to rely on non-profit organizations; governments need to take on more
- Work with other levels of government to maintain funding to programs that work; loss of funding causes major problems
- Maintain a “rights approach” to housing; Education is a right for everyone