

Key Facts - *Coalition for Justice and Human Rights Ltd. v City of Edmonton*

Homelessness in Edmonton by the Numbers

- According to Homeward Trust Edmonton's [By-Name List](#), between 2021 and 2023 the unhoused population in Edmonton increased 71% from 1,820 to 3,112.
 - It's important to note that due to the inherent challenges in accurately counting every unhoused individual, these figures are likely underestimates.
- Most unsheltered Edmontonians:
 - Are Indigenous (55-60% based on the By-Name List), many of whom have personal trauma or intergenerational trauma from “Indian residential schools”, “Indian day schools”, the criminal justice system, and/or the child welfare system.
 - Living with one or more physical, mental or cognitive illnesses (57-70%, based on a sample size of 86 people interviewed in the MAPS Capital Region, “Staying Outside is Not A Preference” report (January 2023), at page 11, [available online](#)).
 - Use drugs and/or live with substance use disorder (approximately 74%, based on the Staying Outside is Not A Preference report, at page iii)
 - Experience trauma (approximately 76%, based on the Staying Outside is Not A Preference report, at page iii)

Barriers to Accessing Shelters

- As of August 2023, the Homeward Trust Edmonton By-Name List states that there are 843 emergency shelter beds available and 1,380 people in Edmonton are without housing or provisional accommodations. Of those 1,380 people:
 - 624 stayed in emergency shelters
 - 672 stayed outside (“unsheltered”)
 - 84 people stayed in locations unknown to Homeward Trust Edmonton
- During winter 2022-23, the Government of Alberta funded additional temporary shelter beds, such that the total number of emergency shelter beds increased temporarily to as much as 1,218 beds between January 27 - February 28, 2023. That was the greatest number of shelter beds available in the City of Edmonton since Fall 2021. However, even during that time and under an ideal scenario where every bed was accessible every night and occupancy rates were at 100%, the City of Edmonton would still have lacked at least 100 shelter beds during that time. So, shelter space in Edmonton has been consistently inadequate for the past two years.

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- Most of the emergency shelter beds available in Edmonton are inaccessible as they are:
 - Overcrowded
 - Do not consistently provide adequate storage space for personal items
 - Do not consistently accommodate couples and families
 - Do not effectively provide accessible accommodations for people living with disabilities
 - Do not accommodate pets
 - Enforce sobriety on everyone seeks shelter
 - Ban specific people
 - Fail to maintain habitable conditions in the shelter free from pests like bed bugs and cockroaches
 - Fail to accommodate and respect the diverse religious and spiritual beliefs of all unhoused Edmontonians.

Encampments as a Response to Experiencing Homelessness

- According to the [Canadian Human Rights Commission](#), a majority of Canada's 25 most populous municipalities have experienced the emergence of homeless encampments since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020.
- Encampments are often understood as the set up of tents, tee-pees, and lean-tos to establish shelter against the elements and foster a sense of community.
- Encampments are dispersed throughout Edmonton, with areas of higher concentration and are generally situated on City-owned land.
- Some individuals who reside in encampments opt to remain in groups, a choice that offers several advantages, including: greater safety through “strength in numbers”, improved accessibility for service providers, resource-sharing, a feeling of belonging, informal systems for governance and conflict resolution, alongside various other compelling factors.

Encampment Displacement Policy

- The City of Edmonton consistently conducts encampment displacements, despite being fully aware of the insufficient housing and shelter space to meet the needs of all Edmontonians.

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- Between October 1, 2021, and March 31, 2023, the City displaced a minimum of 1,127 active encampments.
- The City's current encampment displacement policy involves evaluating encampments through assessments performed by city employees or agents in response to reports.
 - These encampments are then classified into categories such as "inactive", "low risk", "high risk", or "extreme risk" based on the outcome of these assessments.
 - Notably, encampments are predominantly categorized as either high or extreme risk by the City of Edmonton.
 - A considerable number of encampments are subjected to displacement, often with notification periods of less than 24 hours. In certain situations, the urgency is heightened, resulting in encampments being displaced with as little as an hour's notice.
- Displacement causes irreparable harm to displace people including:
 - Decreasing their abilities to provide for their basic needs
 - Loss of contact with essential supports like family, friends, harm reduction outreach workers, housing first works, social services
 - Loss of property including identification. Without identification, it is more difficult for people to access support and services
 - Sleep deprivation, mental anguish, stress, anxiety, and trauma
 - Increased risk of death
- The current regulatory framework lacks provisions for policies that would ensure the availability of adequate shelter space for encampment residents to transition into after a displacement.

Extreme Weather Encampment Displacement

- During periods of extreme weather, including when temperatures are forecasted to drop to -20°C or colder with the windchill for three consecutive nights, the City activates its "Extreme Weather Response". When the Extreme Weather Response is active, the City only displaces encampments they consider to be high or extreme risk. However, City Peace Officers and Edmonton Police Service officers classify most encampments as high or extreme risk, so many encampments are still subject to displacement during periods of extreme weather.

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- For example, the City displaced encampments during the following periods of extreme weather:
 - from November 29 to December 26, 2022: 14 encampments displaced;
 - from February 19 to 24, 2023: 1 encampment displaced; and
 - from March 4 to 12, 2023: 10 encampments displaced.
- People whose encampments the City cleared during periods of extreme weather were subjected to particularly high risks of frostbite, amputations due to frostbite, hypothermia, pneumonia, and death.

Coalition for Justice and Human Rights as the Plaintiff

- CJHR is a non-profit coalition that supports marginalized community members in and around Edmonton by conducting human rights advocacy.
- CJHR's Directors and members are seasoned advocates who champion human rights, particularly for marginalized groups such as unhoused people, people with disabilities, women and youth in the criminal justice system, and those seeking refugee status.
- CJHR will advance this action as a public interest litigant. People residing in encampments do not have the means or capacity and face barriers to commence or maintain a lawsuit challenging the City of Edmonton.

To remain informed about the lawsuit's progress and contribute to covering legal expenses, please visit nandalaw.ca/encampments.

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