Equity in Service Design and Delivery

Final Report

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Background & Methodology

Background

The City of Calgary aspires to ensure that all Calgarians have equitable and fair access to services offered by The City irrespective of Calgarians' race, ethnicity, age, place of origin, colour, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socioeconomic status. This can be achieved by examining service design and delivery through an equity lens. Building on previous research conducted with Equity Deserving Communities (hereafter referred to as EDCs), qualitative interviews with community organizations, partners and agencies, that support and work with different EDCs have been completed.

Methodology

A total of 40 participants representing community organizations shared their feedback on how The City services meet or do not meet the needs of EDCs.

Feedback was solicited via a mix of 22 interviews, 3 dyads and 4 triads – all hosted on MS Teams. Fieldwork took place between Sep 29th and Nov 16th, 2023, with representation from organizations and community agencies that serve various EDCs (see table for detailed breakdown). Participants received a $150 honorarium for their time and participation.

Please note: the following findings are qualitative in nature. The work is exploratory as a result of the number of participants and the method by which the sample was drawn. The results should be regarded as directional in nature and may not be projected to the larger population without further quantitative research.

EDC*	# of organizations participating	Organization names**
People living with disabilities	5	Cerebral Palsy Alberta, Alzheimer Calgary, PREP, Between Friends, Vecova
Indigenous	2	Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary, Warrior Moccasins
Unhoused/low income	3	Calgary Drop-in Centre, CUPS, RISE Calgary
Addiction/mental health	3	Oxford House, Carya, Woods Homes,
Newcomers	6	Centre for Newcomers, Immigrant Services Calgary, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
2SLGBTQIA+	2	End of the Rainbow
Seniors	2	Calgary Senior's Resource Society
Racialized	3	Diversecities, Punjabi Community Health Services, Action Dignity
Other	3	AMIGA, Jewish Family Service Calgary, Habitus Collective

*While organizations are categorized according to the primary equity deserving community that they serve, many organizations serviced multiple EDCs or individuals who belonged to multiple EDCs.
** Only organizations who consented to being named in the final report are shown in the table.

Key findings

Organizations representing various Equity Deserving Communities (EDCs) showcase a shared sense of pride towards the inclusivity and supportive efforts of The City.

- The City of Calgary is seen to actively engage with its diverse population as well as organizations to understand their unique needs, experiences and integrate their voices into city planning, signaling a strong commitment to inclusivity.

While The City is appreciated for its efforts in providing services to EDCs, there is a recognition that more can be done to improve accessibility as well as awareness.

- Participants desire more "tailored" services that reflect The City's changing demographics and emerging needs, emphasizing the importance of program flexibility and relevant service delivery. Cultural sensitivity is also deemed important to catalyze the efficacy of the efforts in serving the "distinct" needs of various populations.

- There is a push for The City to make information about services more understandable and accessible, perhaps by simplifying language and enhancing communication channels. The goal is to ensure that all Calgarians, regardless of their abilities, can access and benefit from the services that are available to them.

- Participants recognize that bureaucratic procedures can be intimidating and confusing, and see the importance of streamlining these processes to make it easier for all EDCs as well as organizations to access and utilize municipal programs and services.

- Many also pointed out two broad areas – employment and tailored housing solutions as "essential" in creating pathways for meaningful opportunities and not leading to other issues.

Key findings (continued)

Across participants, some of the common identified themes included:

- **Enhance Accessibility across Services**: The City should undertake an accessibility audit of all public facilities and services to identify and address gaps. Upgrades to older facilities, improvements in transportation options for the disabled, and the removal of systemic barriers are essential to ensure equitable access for all residents.

- **Increase Affordable Housing:** Develop and implement a robust affordable housing strategy that includes the expansion of low-income housing units, streamlined access to rent support programs, and develops partnerships with private and non-profit sectors to address the housing affordability crisis.

- **Expand Mental Health and Addiction Services:** Allocate additional resources and funding to expand mental health and addiction services. This includes increasing access to the number of available mental health facilities/ professionals and reducing wait times for services.

- **Offer Tailored Employment Opportunities:** Create employment programs that consider diverse skill sets, educational backgrounds, and life experiences. This includes provisions for those transitioning from assistance programs, with a focus on adult employment and meaningful career pathways.

- **Support Newcomers with Comprehensive Guides:** Develop comprehensive guides and mentorship programs to assist newcomers in navigating life in Calgary. This could be coupled with collaboration with community organizations for effective integration.

- **Prioritize Seniors' Services:** Streamline service delivery for seniors, including the direct mailing of bus passes and consideration of non-digital application methods. Regular checks on seniors' housing and accountability measures for providers are also recommended.

- **Promote Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity**: Cultivate cultural competence within The City's programs by offering training for staff, ensuring racialized, Indigenous-led initiatives, and creating services that truly reflect the cultural diversity of Calgary's population.

- **Improve Communication and Engagement:** Adopt a multi-channel communication strategy that includes social media, community meetings, and multilingual resources to improve the visibility and awareness of The City's programs. Consistent engagement with community organizations will also foster stronger partnerships.

- **Implement an Indigenous Policy Framework:** Ensure that the Indigenous policy and framework are not only comprehensive but also actionable. This includes steady funding for Indigenous-led organizations and programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous communities.

Key findings (continued)

Communication

- There were mixed levels of communication between organizations and The City. Those with more frequent communication tended to rely on relationships with City representatives or participation in committees and panels. Others did not have these types of relationships and did not know how to provide feedback to The City.

- Organizations expressed a desire for more frequent updates and education on relevant programs and services, further opportunities for in-person communication, and more transparency around how their suggestions will be/are actioned

- EDCs were seen as being largely unaware of the range of programs and services, leading to calls for the use of multiple communication messages, further efforts to mitigate language barriers, simplified and streamlined processes for service delivery, and the engagement of grassroots organizations to disseminate information.

Detailed findings

Outlook towards City's Programs & Services

Overall positive impressions

Most agreed that The City has made progress towards serving the needs of equity-deserving communities. Numerous reasons underpinned that belief, including:

- **Community engagement:** The City was seen as proactively engaging and reaching out to various EDCs, by themselves or by collaborating with various organizations (large and small) serving the various EDCs. Some also mentioned how there were increased funding opportunities to cater to various EDCs.

- **Efforts in Inclusivity:** The City was recognized for its efforts to serve the distinct needs of various populations and create a sense of community through its range of programs and services. For example: The creation of inclusive playgrounds for families or affordable bus passes for seniors and those with disabilities or Initiatives like the Age-Friendly Calgary Steering Committee showcases The City's interest and commitment to making changes to serve older demographics better.

- **Communication Campaigns and Effectiveness:** There was an appreciation for The City's communication efforts in updating public information outlets and social media channels for programs for various populations. Another example of how translated information is available "easily" was mentioned.

- **Financial Support Programs:** The Fair Entry program was spontaneously mentioned by many participants, which offers subsidies for services like transit and recreation, as it was seen as a valuable resource for individuals with lower income, and newcomers despite some challenges with accessibility and awareness.

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"I think they're not doing a bad job in a lot of ways. When I'm driving around The City, I see things that really do target older adults. Not folks living with dementia specifically, but activities that are trying to build a sense of community."

"But then I see things like The City creating more inclusive playgrounds, so fully accessible playgrounds, for example, the one that opened up in Sandy Beach. That's right by our camp, and that's a great physical object that we can see that The City is putting a lot of emphasis on and is aware and creating spaces for families to actually play and interact together, right? And that's a great observation for us to have so."

"The Fair Entry program has really streamlined application programs for individuals that might be able to access some of those subsidized benefits like bus passes or recreation passes and those sorts of things. And so I know that has been a helpful process, having that all go through one line through Fair Entry."

Broad areas to be addressed

There was a consistent call to build upon the already existing strengths and address the issues in specific areas.

- **Systemic Barriers:** A significant concern was also around the complex systems that make it difficult for EDCs to navigate services. One of the causes identified was the bureaucratic processes and red tape which were seen as intimidating, affecting the ease of accessing and renewing services.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Many mentioned that the awareness and respect for differences among cultures, which can include language, traditions, values and even representation, were not enough and could be an area that can help build immediate connections and effectively serve EDCs.

- **Lack of awareness:** Participants noted a gap in awareness about the services and programs offered by The City, both to EDCs as well as to organizations that serve EDCs. They suggest that better promotion and dissemination of information were needed, especially through different channels. They additionally noted the importance of keeping sight of communities not on social media and those with language barriers,

- **Less resources for specific populations:** While The City does put efforts into providing supports across populations, there was a call for more resources when it comes to mental health and addiction services. Another significant concern mentioned across participants was the availability and accessibility of affordable housing.

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"A lot of it is systemic, I think. The process of having to go from childhood to adulthood for someone with a disability and how there's that transition process, how parents have to apply for legal guardianship and trusteeship. Again, there's so much red tape, there's so much paperwork, there's such a long wait time. People can't move forward without those fundings in place and I think that's the biggest challenge."

"So they're not, the people from their own culture, their own community, their own background are reflected. And I know that I'm just saying what I've heard from people in the community. It's not, I know that there's hiring practice and stuff, and there is more diversity. But definitely, we recently did a dialogue with ethnocultural, with Ethiopian community leaders and faith leaders on accessing services, and they said that there was a sort of sense of a lack of cultural appropriateness and lack of representation."

"So even just bringing awareness and helping with some of the you know, connecting with families who don't know what services are out there. I think they could probably play a bigger role kind of in that and help us kind of reach more families and connect with that.."

Opportunities at a macro level

Systemic Approach to address the needs of EDCs
Rather than an ad hoc approach to addressing needs, some participants wished to see equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) reflected in The City's service plans and strategic priorities. Moreover, they stressed the importance of accountability measures such as evaluation activities and the responsibility of EDI being assigned to a senior leader.

Cultural Representation and Training
Hiring diverse staff, providing cultural competence training, and consulting with various cultural communities to ensure programs and services were culturally sensitive and inclusive. Participants representing Indigenous organizations went further to highlight the importance of The City hiring Indigenous staff. This would help increase the trust and comfort levels of Indigenous people when accessing City services.

Economic Support and Education
Empowerment is considered key. This could include offering educational programs on job training, financial management, and other life skills to enable individuals (particularly immigrants and refugees) to become self-sufficient and better integrate into the community.

Increased Awareness via Accessible Media
Apart from leveraging social media and websites, being present on other accessible media channels (e.g., posters on interiors and exteriors of public transit, leaflets in libraries etc.) to reach diverse populations, including those with limited English or technical proficiencies, and providing clear, information about available resources and services.

Opportunities at a macro level (continued)

✓ **Collaborative Efforts with Non-profits and Community Organizations**
Strengthening partnerships with non-profit organizations to provide a more comprehensive network of support for vulnerable populations, utilizing shared spaces for community activities, and potentially offering collaborative programs. Also, participants felt "joint" efforts could lead to more productive and effective outcomes than targeting with individual efforts.

✓ **Continued Engagement with Non-profits and Community Organizations**
The City is recognized for reaching out, engaging as well receiving feedback from various non-profit agencies and other community organizations. Participants feel engagement should continue and even expand. For instance, The City's collaboration with organizations like Action Dignity and participation in anti-racist research studies show a willingness to engage with and understand the needs of different communities.

✓ **Funding Supports and Opportunities**
The City provides grants and support to organizations working with vulnerable individuals. There were calls for The City to consider increasing financial resources to accommodate these growing populations, especially immigrants and refugees, suggesting that funding should be directed to expanding existing programs and creating new ones to meet their needs.

Within the area of funding, the need for sustainable service models was mentioned. As some expressed concerns about project-based funding that might not ensure long-term serviceability. Hence participants wanted The City to consider more stable funding arrangements that allow for sustained support of essential services.

Opportunities at a macro level
(continued)

"So, we actually had quite a bit of collaboration with The City. Back in 2021, I think The City had conducted an anti-racist research study through Action Dignity. We were first, SPOs participated as research. We get our CLB3 and 4 students, I think about 100 students participated in this study. And the results were shared later with us, and there's like a further discussion and action taken later on."

"They're helpful, we have the Homeless Diversion Project, Bridge Loan Program, where we are getting funding from City of Calgary, and they're helping us to support loans for those people who cannot pay monthly rent, and they experienced some difficulties or they have some other multiple issues. So, yeah, in general, I would say there is always a room for improvement."

"What I have heard from ethnocultural community groups is, that services and programming in general don't necessarily reflect them. They don't see themselves reflected in the services. And I think this is really important if services are going to be accessible, that they feel that there's a sense of safety because there's some reflection of them in that."

"I would add too that like a lot of the funding is very project-based without a sense of what does sustainable service for a community look like, right? It's all well and good to do a project that's going to last a year. But then especially if you have people who are going to come to rely on that, it's never going to be a money-making venture, so how are you going to sustain that? Like it needs to be a longer-term commitment than just building a project?"

"Most services, like my agency, we do receive bus passes on a regular basis from The City that we give to our clients. So that's a good service but again, the work is always on these agencies, and mine included, to break those services to clients, in the sense of, we have to explain. I once had to write down I would say 15 steps to one client and I translated them in Arabic because he doesn't speak English, on how to get from his house to his kids school. So again, maybe in the future, The City can benefit from, you know, AI and those smart stuff by having immediate translation on their website."

Service Areas

Parks and recreation

Overall impressions

- Parks and recreation programs and services were noted by participants as being widely used and valued across all EDCs.

- There were several elements of parks and recreation programs and services that participants particularly valued, including:

  - **Programming:** many noted the quality and range of programs and services available. For example, sports programming for children was highlighted as being highly accessible and providing opportunities for youth to engage in activities they wouldn't otherwise have access to.

  - **Equitable access and availability:** participants emphasized the accessibility of recreation centers, as they are evenly distributed across different neighbourhoods and geographic areas within Calgary.

  - **Sense of community:** recreation centers (e.g., the Genesis Centre) were seen as facilitating a sense of community and belonging by acting as a communal gathering point. They were believed to cater to diverse cultural backgrounds and ages.

> *"I think of the Genesis Centre, and I think of what a cool space that is. They offer programming for so many folks from different cultural backgrounds and different ages."*
>
> *"We've really appreciated the Stay and Play or those drop-in kind of activities in the summer that are kind of scattered all over the place. I think they've done a really beautiful job of creating quick access to those with not a lot of questions asked, and really been able to provide opportunities for families to utilize those services and supports with beautifully caring and energetic people. I think that provides a bit of reprieve for some of our families to give their children rich experiences that they otherwise would not be able to provide, because they can't afford to send them to a summer camp, or an overnight camp, or to try a certain type of sport. I don't know if it's all sports for all people or whatever it is, we've had a number of our children who have never had hockey equipment on before, or never tried a certain sport, go and just be enamored by the opportunity. And those are things that we try to take advantage of, and they're accessible for everybody that we serve."*

Across the EDCs, there were some who had perspectives that identified community-specific needs or considerations. These included:

2SLGBTQIA+
- These communities were believed to appreciate recreation programs and services
- However, participants highlighted that safety and feeling welcomed within City facilities was a concern for many, and performative actions alone (e.g., displaying pride flags) is not enough.

Seniors
- Seniors appreciated the social engagement aspect of recreation programs, and there were mentions of some programs heavily used by seniors (e.g., aquafit).
- However, there was a perceived lack of collaboration between Parks and Recreation and senior's centers, which could enhance service offerings.

People living with disabilities
- In terms of programming for people living with disabilities, there were significant gaps identified related to the lack of programming for adults or seniors with disabilities. There were also concerns about training processes for City staff working with children who have disabilities, resulting in calls for collaborative training processes.

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"In the evenings for the aquafit and stuff like that, it's all older adults who are there. And it creates a really nice sense of community. They all know each other. They look out for each other. They call each other if somebody's missing. So, I think once you're in it can be a really great service."

"I've been involved in trans peer support for about a decade now, and we've never felt safe in specific recreation setting, and so we've always made our own alternates, right? Like when I first came out, there was a group that would rent out the Mount Royal pool once a month, so that there could be a safe swim space that was only for members of the community, right, and that was like a private booking. So, I don't know that The City is aware of how unsafe people that are queer necessarily feel in specific spaces, because we've always been creating our own spaces when we wanted to engage in certain things and knew it potentially could be unsafe."

Barriers and challenges

Despite the broad appreciation for parks and recreation programs and services in Calgary, participants identified several barriers and challenges, related to:

- **Accessibility:** some identified challenges in accessibility and inclusivity in parks and recreational facilities and programs. For example, unsuitable facility designs, a lack of gender neutral and accessible bathrooms, non-inclusive playgrounds, and cold pool temperatures. Some participants mentioned that they felt City staff may not be equipped or properly trained to work with children with disabilities, making programs inaccessible for this population.

- **Limited awareness:** there was an identified lack of awareness within communities about the available recreation programs and services. Some programs and services were perceived as being too far away, leading to underutilization.

- **Fees:** recreation fees were seen as a barrier for some. Particularly for newcomers who may have limited disposable income and a preference for their children to prioritize academics as opposed to recreational activities, the paywall may deter accessing these programs.

- **Programming for seniors:** participants felt that there was limited recreation programming that was directed towards seniors, leaving them with minimal opportunities for social activities or engagement with their community. Further, there was a significant gap identified with regards to seniors living with disabilities.

- **Prioritization of basic needs:** for community members in vulnerable situations, basic needs (e.g., food, housing, utilities) are their primary concern, making parks and recreation services a lower priority.

- **2SLGBTQIA+ inclusivity:** Safety concerns were seen a barrier to accessing services for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Some felt a need for more targeted and inclusive spaces that expressly support and welcome 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

"Everything has a paywall. So it's like how are you engaging communities that just arrived? And I can say for the kids we work with, parents are like, "You should be going to school. We didn't come to Canada for you to be playing outside all the time." You're already trying to convince parents to let their kids do it. And then, it's like a lot of the fact that like some of these clubs are asking for like $1,000 a year, for soccer and basketball and stuff.""

"Really those kinds of activities are low on the totem pole, like really, we're working with them to figure out how are they eating? Are they housed?"

"No warm pools...They do have the accessible changing rooms, but they're not done in a safe manner, right? Adaptive fitness programs, I'm familiar maybe with more of a senior fitness program. I am not familiar with any special needs programs unless it's a high functioning individual with a disability."

"We did actually have a case earlier this year of a trans woman who was harassed and exposed to a room by somebody who like broke into the change room."

"I think for [parks and recreation], I don't see any of our folks accessing any of that, just because are not well enough to access shelter, you know what I mean?"

"However, we have found that the majority of our community doesn't know about this service... It's rarely that you know about them."

"I don't think there is really anything for older middle-aged people living with Down syndrome, whether or not they have dementia, because it wasn't really something that was thought of in the past."
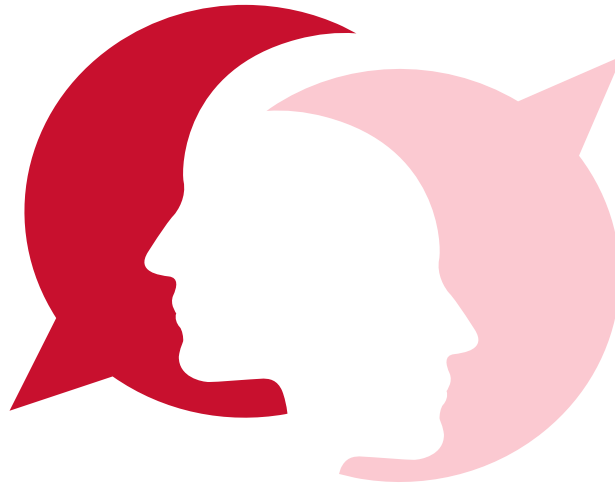
Suggestions for improvement

Raising awareness and promoting services:
Effective communication and outreach are necessary to ensure all communities are aware of the services and programs available. To raise awareness, some suggested more effective use of social media and outreach in diverse communities, which may lead to increased engagement and utilization.

Addressing safety and visibility for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community:
Improvements could be made by addressing safety concerns within City facilities, as well introducing design features that expressly support and welcome 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (e.g., signage and gender-neutral washrooms. Some felt that The City should consider establishing a community center to specifically cater to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity:
There is a need for facilities and programs to be designed with the needs of all community members in mind, including those with disabilities, to create truly inclusive spaces. Suggestions include designing facilities with the needs of people with disabilities in mind, making parks and playgrounds more accessible, warming up pool temperatures, and ensuring programs are not just accessible but also inclusive.

Introducing targeted and free of cost programming
Programming targeted to specific communities could increase the usage and enjoyment of recreation services. For example, free programs and services offered in different languages, programming for seniors (including those with disabilities), programming based on the demographics of the community (e.g., cultural demographics) and the need for family-based support and activities that could help with the integration process into the system.

Collaboration with organizations to train staff
For participants working with children that have disabilities, there was a desire for their organizations to train City staff in how to accommodate any associated behavioral challenges and be equipped to provide any required physical support.

"But if there was kind of more intentionality built around what would support in those programs look like in order to make them successful and to be open and supportive of having a wide range of diverse abilities in those programs, would probably be what our families would look for."

"The only thought I have, there are senior's centres throughout The City too, and I'm not sure if Parks and Recreation and the senior's centres could [be] more coordinated and collaborative or offer some of the things in their facilities."

"It would be really nice I think for us to have that partnership with [The City] and be able to train their staff, so that anyone can kind of access their programs"

Suggestions for improvement
(continued)

"Parks and recreation [is] something that comes up quite a bit from our members, as they're looking for more inclusive recreational opportunities. And I know it's something that's requested often from us is, can we provide some support or training for just community groups that might have a child with Down syndrome in their class and want to learn how to make it a successful experience for everyone. And if The City had access, or even just a clear focus and supports to make those community leisure and recreation opportunities as inclusive as possible, especially for our population."

I think I go back to the point to having more frontline staff. Like if you have these decentralized offices in different points of the community with people spreading information to go into these communities and having this kind of conversation, I think that that will really help to let people know about this one. Social media, I believe, is the best way. It doesn't matter if you're a senior or a youth, you are in some kind of social media. So promoting these kind of programs through social media is also beneficial for the community."

"So, having that kind of permanence and visibility is something our foundation is trying to work on, and I think it would lend great comfort to the LGBT community to have something like that. It would also act as an attractor to other groups. So, when you open up a centre like that, and other groups would then be able to come to it, and there would be a central meeting place or point where people could develop that community independent of The City."

"It could be a good idea if The City [does] this research to see what is the culturally appropriate program for specific communities, if they have the urban population, what groups are predominant there, and address the programs according to [that]."

"So, do we have true gender-neutral bathrooms that are also accessible because people with disabilities aren't always just falling into the binary of male or female, right? You could be gender fluid and self-identify as a different gender, but also use a wheelchair in a change room, right?"

Arts and culture

Overall impressions

- When discussing arts and culture programs and services in Calgary, participants tended to focus on libraries as being deeply valued and appreciated.

- There were several factors that contributed to the positive perceptions of libraries, including:

    - **Accessibility and inclusivity:** libraries were noted as being widely available and accessible in all communities, and as offering a wide variety of programming.

    - **Community engagement:** similar to recreation centres, libraries were understood as a hub for community members to gather and engage with one another.

    - **Universal concept:** libraries were recognized as a location for resources by those who may not be familiar with other methods of accessing information and support.

    - **Digital resources:** the availability of technology and digital resources (e.g., computers, iPads) in libraries was emphasized as important, especially for those who may not have internet access otherwise.

- With regards to other arts and culture programs, several participants mentioned festivals and events. However, this tended to go hand-in-hand with a perceived lack of awareness and some financial barriers.

For most EDCs, overall impressions of arts and culture programs and services remained consistent, however one group was identified as having specific needs:

Newcomers were identified as a community that may leverage libraries to a larger extent, particularly given their universal nature.
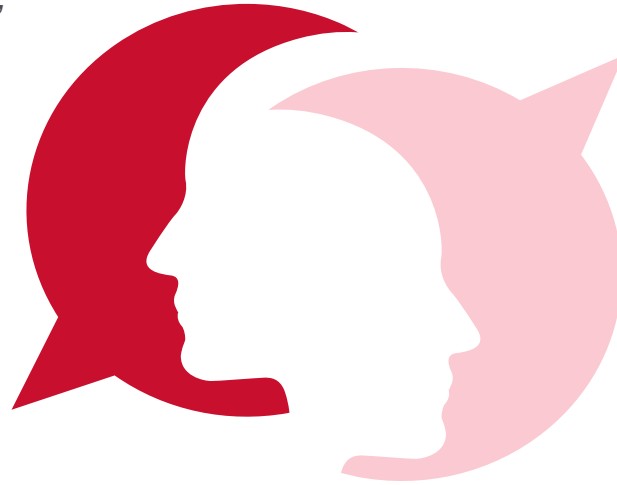
Additionally, they were noted as potentially having more difficulty accessing library programs and services, due to language barriers and the 'digital divide'.

> *"Like libraries, I hear nothing but positive things about libraries. You know, the variety of programming, accessibility, just really lots of opportunities for communities to connect there and meet the needs of the local communities too."*

Overall impressions (continued)

"I quite like the library. They do have newcomer programs, particularly at the one downtown, that are pretty good with multiple languages that they can serve out of."

"I know, our families access libraries quite a bit. and I feel like they do quite a good job on being inclusive spaces for a lot of our families."

"Absolutely, libraries offer great services to the residents of Calgary...we see those events to be well received by the community in Calgary."

"Newcomers very often rely on the libraries for a number of different things... ensuring that there's newcomers services in the library system is a really important and critical thing for newcomers, more generally."

Barriers and challenges

Common barriers and challenges mentioned by EDCs included:

- **Limited depth of awareness:** several identified limited awareness with regards to the range of programs and services offered in libraries, noting the common association of libraries with books and nothing else.

- **Lost programs and services:** some noted programs and services that no longer existed in libraries (e.g., mental health supports), and emphasized the need to maintain and continue these programs.

- **'Digital divide' and language barriers:** for newcomers particularly, there were identified language barriers and a perceived lack of digital literacy, making it difficult for them to be informed and access the full range of available programs and services.

- **COVID-19:** people living with disabilities specifically mentioned challenges accessing library services during the pandemic. These were noted as unique and temporary, however highlighted the importance of accessible services in exceptional circumstances.

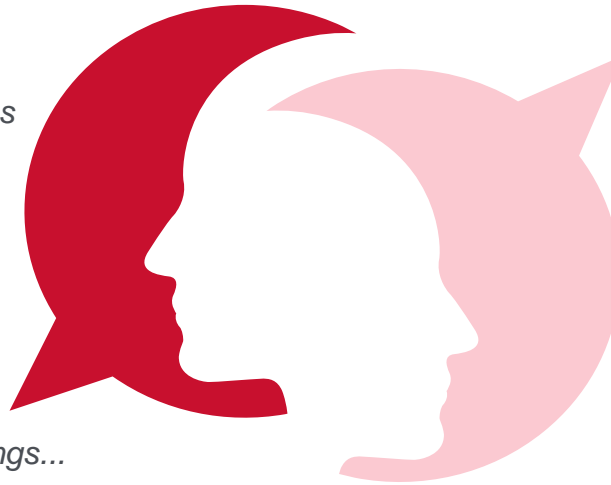**Only one participant mentioned a barrier related to arts and cultural programs and events.**

- **Financial barriers:** some felt that music festivals and events were not accessible for those with lower incomes, due to ticket prices and fees.

Barriers and challenges (continued)

"Sometimes festivals and events are not accessible to people with low incomes, depending on if there's entry fees or that sort of thing."

"We do not have enough programs to teach these people on digital literacy...we end up having only those who are educated having knowledge of these things, use the service and those who are in the lower bracket, never."

"I haven't had any challenges in terms of being able to access the services except when we were in COVID, which was a unique situation."

"However, we have found that the majority of our community doesn't know about [library services]... It's rarely that you know about them."

"Newcomers very often rely on the libraries for a number of different things... ensuring that there's newcomers services in the library system is a really important and critical thing for newcomers, more generally."

"I will say that they've had some programs that I wish could have stayed in place... I do wish that they still had the mental health desk."

Suggestions for improvement

Subsidies and free access to events and festivals:
Festivals and events could be made more accessible through subsidies or free tickets, as cost can be a barrier to access for members of EDCs.

Increased coordination with organizations:
To enhance offered programs and services, and increase broader awareness and engagement among EDCs, some suggested increased coordination with organizations serving these communities.

Sustained and increased support for services:
There was an emphasis on the importance of sustained support for critical services, as well as the expansion of existing services. Participants specifically noted the mental health desk, which was seen as a valuable but lost resource.

Inclusive engagement:
To ensure that all EDCs can easily engage with programs and services, some suggested steps to simplify access (e.g., providing translated materials and support for those with limited digital skills).

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"I think for sure, a lot of the music festivals have more fees attached and music can be very…it can bring diverse groups together because they can have an appreciation for the music and that sort of thing. So maybe musical events."

"I will say, I will begin with the translation and the community contact. Like if you do those two things, ensure information is understandable for the people that you want to reach out, and you have less administrative and more frontline staff, I think that that will help you to flow the rest of the conversation."

"But again, the process of accessing it might really need to be simplified...as well as The City or the involvement of The City in coordinating the efforts among different organizations would be something needed as well."

Fair Entry Program

Overall impressions

- Participants expressed an appreciation for, the Fair Entry Program on behalf of the communities they service. There was significant use of this program among nearly all EDCs, with many specifically mentioning Low-Income Transit Passes and Recreation Fee Assistance.

- Participants noted several specific efforts to make this program accessible and valuable for EDCs, including:
  - **Centralized support:** some noted efforts to centralize support and assistance, particularly through hubs close to transit locations. This was seen as increasing accessibility and direct support.
  - **Equitable benchmarking:** the Fair Entry Program was seen as serving as an exemplary model for other programs in terms of inclusivity and accessibility.

One EDC stood out as having specific needs and/or considerations.

Newcomers were identified as a group that may rely heavier on the Fair Entry Program, as they may have limited income and require financial supports while establishing themselves in Calgary.

However, they were also noted as the group that may have the most difficulty accessing the program, due to the rigid eligibility criteria and potential language barriers. This was noted as being particularly true for refugee claimants in Calgary.

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"That is something that people do use. And something that I would encourage them to continue because a large number of the individuals that we support live on very fixed income."

"I know that The City has put together like a little hub right by one of the train stations, I think it's actually almost right across from City Hall, where there's like a few small non-profits, like the Alex is there, a couple others, Mustard Seed."

Barriers and challenges

Participants identified several significant barriers to access, including:

- **Eligibility criteria:** rigid eligibility criteria and requirements (e.g., having a home address, notice of tax assessments, parental sign off for those under eighteen years old) were seen as the most significant barrier to access. Some mentioned flexibility in certain areas, for example, the ability of a social worker to sign off on or accept bank statements instead of a notice of assessment – however, noted the lengthy wait times to access a social worker.

- **Lack of awareness:** most had a broad awareness of the Fair Entry Program overall, however there was a limited depth of awareness around the range of supports and services associated with this program (e.g., No Cost Spay/Neuter Program.) Participants also noted awareness gaps among EDCs with regards to the application process, which may hinder accessibility.

- **Difficulty accessing services:** many highlighted the complexity and difficulty associated with accessing services, due to the bureaucratic structures, difficulties accessing information on The City website, and time commitment required. These factors were believed to be daunting for EDCs and may deter them from trying to access the program.

- **Language barrier:** for those with limited English proficiency, language was identified as a significant barrier, as they are likely to struggle with gaining an understanding of the program, the eligibility criteria, and the application process.

- **Program names:** one participant took issue with the names of various subsidy programs (e.g., Calgary Parking Low-Income Market Permit), as they felt it designated those accessing programs as inferior by highlighting their lower income levels.

"They're overwhelmed by even beginning to look at those services... They have to jump through so many hoops that they're frustrated with the system."

"There's so much that I don't know that The City offers, and only when I research it and spend time...I'm like, this is helpful for this client."

"The eligibility criteria includes the notice of assessment from a newcomer. When you think of a newcomer who are coming in a new country, they cannot have a notice of assessment even if they file taxes. It takes the time to get notice of assessment. And it's a process, because they need information on how the tax system works here, how the financial system works here before they actually file taxes and have notice of assessment. So that is something we find is always a struggle for a newcomer to get."

"The City website is, from a communications standpoint, not the easiest to navigate. It can be very difficult to find what you're looking for, for anything."

"I think some of our families, I know for sure didn't know about it, and so we would essentially send them the link and have them sort of navigate that as well."

"Having a language barrier in many cases would result in a client's misunderstanding [of] what is required from them. Many clients, once they get the social worker letter, they think that they will automatically get into the program. So, they have the application, but they don't know that this application needs to be filled with the supportive documents, support document, and be submitted. And after a while, they discover that they are still, even though they have the social worker letter, but still, they do not have access, but it is basically because they didn't apply. And again, this due to language barrier."

"The Fair Entry Program, the ones that I always see are like the monthly passes. I have to talk about seniors. There's so many more that again, where do people get this information? Everyone just says, go get a bus pass, and you're eligible for it. Okay, great. I didn't know there was a no cost spay neuter program. That's incredible. I didn't know that existed."
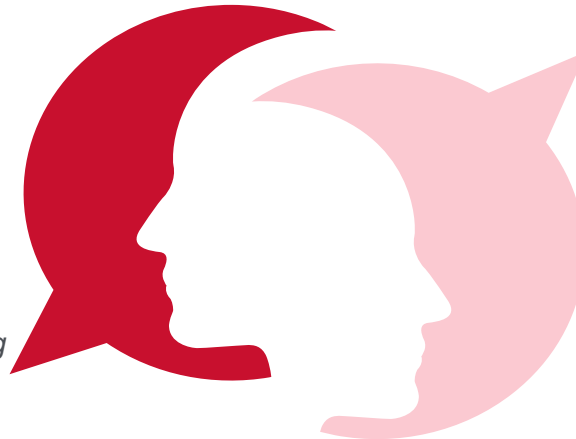
Suggestions for improvement

✓ **Improving access to the program**
Allowing for more flexibility in the eligibility criteria and requirements, as well as making it easier to access social workers, would allow for higher usage of this program and make it easier for vulnerable individuals to gain access. This could include:
- Broadening eligibility to include temporary addresses
- Simplifying the application process
- Bringing social workers to community spaces (e.g., recreation centres, libraries) to help people access the program
- Broadening the types of professionals that can be leveraged to access the program (e.g., physicians, bank officials)

✓ **Addressing awareness gaps**
Some suggested providing streamlined lists of resources, robust channels (e.g., monthly email updates) to disseminate information to organizations and EDCs and simplified and clear information about the program and application process on The City website.

✓ **Reducing language barriers**
To facilitate ease of access, particularly for newcomers, participants suggested several actions to reduce language barriers. These included: funding interpretation staff, hiring social workers who are fluent in multiple languages, and providing translated materials in multiple languages that outlining the program, eligibility criteria and application process.

"

"But when you look at the detailed criteria of that RSW letter, that is very discriminatory in terms of it can only be given to client for once, and it's just RSW. No other professional like a physician, like maybe a notary or any bank official. It can be flexible in that way, because these are all the avenues where newcomer access when they are new to a country, rather than just RSW"

"How do we get that streamline so that there's like the top five that we find most individuals need or the top three that, you know, these are what you'll need soon as you're here, these are the things that will help you if you're in this situation."

"We need more information on it. How it's accessible, who is available to get it, what we need to do in order to get it. I think information is needed."

Affordable Housing For Low Income Calgarians

Overall impressions

- For most participants, affordable housing was a significant concern. However, this was noted as being a critical issue for all Calgarians given the current economic climate, rather than a challenge exclusive to EDCs.

- There was an acknowledgement of The **City's involvement** in addressing affordable housing challenges through taking the following steps:
    - **Consultation with Partners and Community Groups**: The City not working in isolation rather actively seeking the input and expertise of local organizations, community advocates, and residents who experience the housing challenges firsthand.
    - There was a **willingness to listen** to the concerns and suggestions brought forward by experts in the field of housing and social services.
    - **Initiatives beyond affordable housing stock such as** multi-unit multi-bed buildings, lane housing and tiny houses which could contribute to increasing housing stock in general.

> "
>
> *"I do want to commend The City on their work with the affordable housing solutions that they put forward recently."*
>
> *"I think The City's very good at consulting with partners, very good at consulting with the community."*

Nuances between different EDCs were evident:

Those living with disabilities experienced a lack of affordable and accessible housing establishing themselves in Calgary. The challenge was not only affordability but also functionality and accessibility.

Organizations, including those serving seniors, pointed out the lack of appropriate housing options – unsafe, non-accessible and isolated.

The **Indigenous community** faced substantial barriers due to stringent eligibility requirements set by landlords, as well as cultural insensitivity which disproportionately affected them.

The **2SLGBTQIA+ and racialized group** highlighted the absence of affordable housing initiatives specifically targeting them, pointing out the dangers they faced in the current shelter system due to noted stigma and discrimination associated with affordable housing.

Newcomers faced challenges with the availability of rental housing and accessing information, compounded by language and digital literacy barriers. There was a gap in finding information about available housing options.

"And often because they don't do well in large multi-residential environments... the options for housing is very limited."

"So, I know that I've talked to numerous people who would rather sleep rough than have to navigate the shelter system as somebody who is queer, because they've had horrific experiences in the past of homophobic or transphobic violence."

"In terms of the sudden increase in the rent and the house prices, as well as also for some clients, they do not have the information. They don't know where to go. And this is obviously a point when you see a client that comes to you and they need to have information about shelters, and even phone numbers, because in many cases they need to contact the shelters themselves."

Barriers and challenges

## Common barriers across populations included:

- **General shortage:** despite The City's efforts, the demand for affordable housing far exceeds the supply. This included a severe shortage of affordable units and long year-long waitlists making it unavailable at the time when needed.

- **Lack of suitable units:** participants highlighted struggles of obtaining "appropriate" housing units for those with diverse needs especially individuals with disabilities. For those serving newcomers, they highlighted the challenges of finding suitable units to accommodate families with multiple children when accounting for rules for room sharing between siblings of different sexes. The lack of transit options to units developed further out from the downtown core was also highlighted.

- **Stringent eligibility criteria:** obtaining housing for Indigenous couples, individuals with disabilities, newcomers, and those with mental health and addiction issues was seen as challenging. The rigid eligibility requirements set by landlords (mainly private) and the lack of culturally sensitive education for both tenants and landlords create additional barriers.

- **Challenges with Multi-Residential Units:** The limited amount of housing has led to multiple groups with competing needs being housed together, which can sometimes create conflicts.

- **Lack of accessible information:** Some also pointed out a lack of awareness of information about available resources, where to find, whom to contact etc. for shelters and low-income housing programs. Digital and language barriers were also articulated by those serving newcomers.

"There's just not enough affordable housing options for individuals. So wait lists are extremely long, and if you have someone who needs it now, they can't wait two years, five years. Like, some of the lists are that long. And because we're also in a supply crunch when you used to be able to find maybe some other alternatives, like a basement suite or that sort of thing for individuals, then those options aren't even available."

"But to be able to create some kind of a housing network that is a safe space for us to live because it is so much important, it's such an important piece to live where you're not being harassed by racist neighbors or judged. Yeah, there's some really ugly things that happen out there and I've experienced them. And so, you know, speaking firsthand and being a decent member in society and still encountering these things is, you know, my heart goes out to the families that don't have, you know, advocates or voices to know when a landlord is being wrong with them."

"So you know, currently, it's very, very hard, even as a working couple, Indigenous couple, to find housing because of the eligibility requirements that landlords are wanting now, to make three times the amount of rent and to have a good credit score above, 700 or whatever they're expecting."
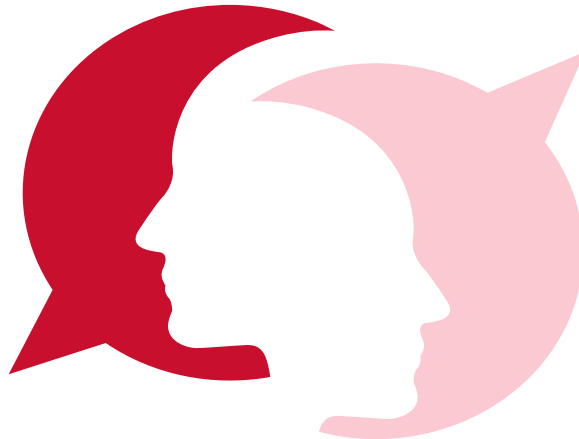
"Oh, difficult. So very long wait lists, not appropriate housing. Seniors primarily; I mean, seniors don't typically, we don't want them places where there's stairs, we don't want them in high-risk communities, we need them to be safe. So, I mean, we all know there's a housing shortage, I believe across Canada, Calgary particularly. We're in a crisis."

"The need for housing for individuals with disabilities and mental health as well, [combined]. And the options for housing are very limited. And often because they don't do well in large multi-residential environments. To give you a specific example, when we were looking at trying to find a townhouse or a duplex unit that is affordable, it was very difficult because of the huge number of individuals that are looking for affordable housing. Often it is designated for families because there is such a gap in terms of the housing environment for families. So then for individuals who have a disability and mental health, a dual diagnosis, that individual will not do well in a family environment. And so we're often excluded or say that yes, they'd like to work with us but there's a greater need for x, y, and z, and so for these other individuals. So I think that's also a gap, not just on the accessibility end but also on the housing options for individuals that fall through the cracks."

Suggestions for improvement

Awareness and Education
Focus on the need for education and information for both tenants and landlords, could be crucial for creating an "equitable" housing system. Educational programs could lead to better tenant-landlord relationships and help vulnerable populations understand their rights and responsibilities.
A specific call for "Housing Indigenous 101" was made to educate both Indigenous tenants and landlords about cultural sensitivities and the realities of renting.

Innovative Housing Solutions
Exploring and implementing more creative housing solutions such as office conversions to residential units, lane housing, tiny houses, and house-sharing programs to increase the diversity of housing options available was suggested.

Data Collection and Analysis
Collecting and analyzing data on the needs of people with disabilities, mental health issues, and the ageing population. This can inform policies and programs that cater to these specific groups.

Subsidies
Need for more access to subsidies if there isn't enough supply of affordable housing. The idea is that if the current housing stock cannot meet the demand, particularly for vulnerable populations like seniors on fixed incomes, subsidies could help bridge the gap.

"

"It sounds like the big things is kind of that similar type of education, you know, both for tenants and landlords, but as well as a more supportive housing programs, you know, directed towards Indigenous people in a way that supports them, not calls them out."

"I think there might need to be more access to subsidies if there's not enough supply of affordable housing. And as I already mentioned, you have to apply through every provider, and it's not centralized. And so it's very, very time-consuming for individuals to apply for affordable housing. And so it's kind of a combination of supply and efficiency for the application process."

Suggestions for improvement
(continued)

Centralizing Applications
Streamlining the application process for affordable housing could help make it more efficient. This can be done possibly by creating a centralized system where individuals can apply for multiple housing options through one portal.

Collaboration with Local Service Providers
The City could work together with local agencies and service providers to address gaps in services such as housing, food, clothing, and especially services not directly provided by The City for newcomers.

Addressing specific needs for those with disabilities, seniors, having mental health challenges, 2SLGBTQIA+ and families
- Seniors and those with disabilities – accessible and appropriate options are desirable.
- Those with disabilities and mental health challenges – may not thrive in large multi-residential environments.
- For families and seniors – Allowing for safety and preventing isolation and displacement from communities.
- Dedicated options for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities – Offering safe and acceptable environments.

Higher levels of respect:
Participants expressed concern about the perceived low levels of respect and care being given to seniors, particularly with regards to their living conditions, and called for change in this area. This could involve regular checks on seniors housing and more accountability for organizations that provide housing.

"We need appropriate housing across the board. You know, we need seniors to be able to live in a place where there's some predictability and long-term planning that it's not a, you know, 'this is what's open, take it'."

"They're tucking away our seniors, the people who built the foundation for what we are on, and they're tucking them away in what I would consider unsuitable living conditions... You should be respected for all the hard work you've done, the families you've raised, your contribution to The City and have nice accommodations."

Transportation

Overall impressions

- Broadly, participants felt that The City was moving in the right direction with regards to recent improvements of transportation services. Despite some identified challenges, transportation programs and services were identified as important across EDCs.

- Some of the strengths and recent improvements around transportation programs and services, as identified by participants, included:
  - **Low-Income Transit Pass programs:** many participants felt that public transit in Calgary was relatively accessible, because of this program. They thought it to be very valuable for EDCs, and high awareness and usage of this program was believed to suggest effective outreach and communication
  - **Community Engagement:** The City was seen by as having successful engagement and responsive partnerships with organizations and EDCs, this was due to their addressing previous barriers to access that were brought forth by one organization. Specifically, the requirements around a home address and concerns about sharing personal information.

> "
> "I think they have done a great job in the past and then they're working in the right direction. I really do not have too much comments on that, and I really appreciate their work. Access programs and services, transportation, transit, taxi."
>
> "I think in the beginning they required an address or something like that, some kind of identifier. And I think it was an address in the beginning, but they lowered that. And that was problem because many didn't have it. Second, our clients were really paranoid about giving any kind of personal information, so we were trying to think what would be reasonable halfway through. So, I think it just took some conversations, and as far as I'm aware, we resolved those. Because we get a lot of low-income passes, for sure."

EDCs which relied more heavily on transit were:

Seniors were noted as being able to maintain independence by using Calgary transportation services, as it provides them with essential mobility. For some, transit was relied upon as a "safe haven" of sorts. One participant noted that seniors often ride the bus to get out of the house in colder weather – largely due to a lack of programming for seniors.

However, they face physical, environmental, and psychological safety concerns when using public transportation (particularly those with dementia) and some felt there was a need for more accessible transit options.

People Living with Disabilities were noted as heavily relying on Access Calgary. There were mixed reviews towards these services, with some expressing dissatisfaction due to delays or long wait times and rigid booking systems, while others commended it for showing excellent care and giving clients individualized attention.

Newcomers were also noted as being largely dependent on transit services, as well as low-income transit passes, as many may not have access to a vehicle.

"

"Transit provides that sense of independence for folks who are no longer able to drive and allows them to navigate through The City."
"A lot of older adults are absolutely terrified to even step outside of their home, never mind get onto a bus and then go to a train platform and navigate that with a walker."

"We have had instances with Access Calgary drivers who have gone to take the client to an appointment, for example, and they would have been met there by say their job coach in their supported employment environment. And we…for whatever reason we might have been delayed or there might have been something going on. And we've seen drivers like really go a long ways to making sure that person is a-okay in that situation."

Barriers and challenges

Common barriers mentioned by participants with regards to transportation in Calgary included the following:

- **Safety concerns:** participants from multiple EDCs (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+, Newcomers, Racialized, Seniors) noted significant safety concerns regarding transit, particularly during later hours in the evening and at certain stations (e.g., Marlborough Station).

- **Accessibility and flexibility issues:** many noted difficulties in accessing the transit system due to physical barriers, extreme weather (e.g., icy sidewalks in the winter) and rigid systems with Access Calgary that do not cater to spontaneity or individualized needs (e.g., inability to make multiple stops and last-minute bookings).

- **Mental health related barriers:** if individuals with a mental health condition have negative behavioural incidents with Access Transit staff, they may not be accommodated in the future for the safety of Access Calgary staff. However, this can create a strain for organizations that may need to fill the service gap.

- **Limited coverage:** the transit system coverage in Calgary was seen as being limited, particularly between neighborhoods and outside of the downtown core. Due to the lack of suitable and available real estate for programs and services downtown, programming from community organizations tends to take place outside of the downtown, creating challenges in attracting members of EDCs.

- **Economic barriers:** Indigenous and Racialized participants highlighted economic barriers preventing equitable access to transit services, such as the inability to afford fares leading to tickets and penalties, and increased fares during the pandemic.

- **Racism and discrimination:** a minority of participants identified broader challenges on transit, which were related to experiences of racism and over policing within the transit system. 2SLGBTQIA+ participants noted similar experiences of discrimination. There was also mention of a lack of accountability (e.g., by The City and Police Service) for discriminatory behavior.

Barriers and challenges (continued)

"We still have areas that are mainly disconnected if there is no C train there or LRT, but mostly on the local buses and the local communities."

"Sometimes the route of the buses are not very comprehensive, so people have to take multiple buses to move through one side of The City to the other one, which doesn't make sense. Should be less [transfers]. So sorry, what I can say is that the route could be optimized."
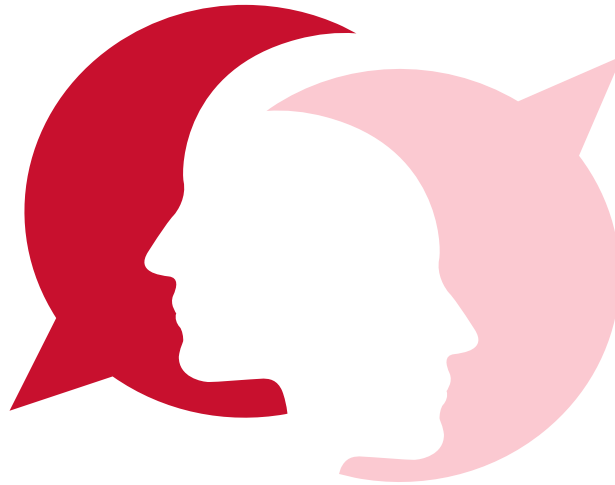
"Program ended at 8:00 pm, bus doesn't show till 10:00 pm, right? So, we're waiting there with them and this isn't an atypical story of people's lives."

"So, transportation, I mean I think the biggest thing there for most of our people is getting tickets for not paying for their transit, right, because they can't afford it."

"My wife, she said that by herself, there is no way that today she will go into the C Train if she's alone."

"It's getting further and further out, in terms of being more in the suburbs or extreme locations. And that means we need transportation to facilitate those people getting to appointments or facilities where they receive programming. And so I think that's another concern that The City needs to take into consideration as like…Often we're seeing housing development further out. And we've got no other option but to go there because there's nothing else available. So just wanted to raise that as well in terms of access for transit."

"I can attest to the safety piece because, yes, my office is right beside a train station. There's even been a murder there. It is probably one of the most unsafe stations in the whole system."

Suggestions for improvement

Improve communication and engagement
There was emphasis placed on the importance of ongoing communication and engagement with EDCs to address and resolve transit access issues, aligning with the broader sentiment surrounding the need to engage with communities in order to understand and address their specific needs.

Increase flexibility of assisted transit programs
Several participants offered suggestions or improvements to make Access Calgary more accessible and convenient for those living with disabilities. These included: broadening the eligibility criteria to access this service, allowing for flexibility in the number of stops made and day-of bookings, and hiring more drivers to address service delays.

Improve transit connectivity
Address gaps in transit coverage across Calgary, to ensure easy and efficient travel across all areas of The City.

Introduce transit ambassadors
Implementing a program with individuals who will travel with those who are less comfortable on transit (e.g., Seniors, People Living with Disabilities) to familiarize them with frequent routes.

Ensuring accessibility year-round
Given the extreme winter weather in Calgary (e.g., heavy ice and snow), several participants called for 'accessible pathways' that were regularly maintained to ensure safe access to bus stops and transit platforms.

"

But even if there were certain pathways that they could say, these accessible pathways, we will ensure are kept. We'll even have a sign that says the last time this was taken care of. So, at least if there were certain parks or certain paths that they knew were safe to walk on, I think that would make a difference as well."

"I think transit ambassadors or people in vests who would be willing to take an entire…like go from Saddle Town all the way to City Hall with an individual, because they saw them in that vest and said, "Hey I need help to get to these next few stops. Can you ride transit with me to help get me there?" Like a companionship-type but a bit more informal. You see the person, you ask, they take you. I think that would be really helpful for…not even older adults, but just really anyone who has some of those nerves."

Employment

Overall impressions

- Participants felt that The City has made strides in providing employment programs and job fairs across populations be it for the youth, newcomers or the racialized populations.

- Several factors contributed to the positive perceptions, including:
  - **Effective communication and marketing:** The City was seen to be doing well in terms of communication and marketing of their employment programs and fairs. Having said that, there is a lot of scope to being inclusive in their communication.
  - **Collaborations and partnerships:** the value of collaboration and partnerships with The City of Calgary was acknowledged by participants. There were mentions of The City of Calgary Youth Employment Services who are working closely with agencies that serve immigrants and refugees, indicating a collaborative effort.
    - The program has also been a valuable resource for employment teams working with disabled individuals. The collaboration has allowed for successful inclusion through joint job fairs, training, and information sharing, which has been particularly useful for disabled youth.

Besides other populations, there was a focused effort on providing employment opportunities for two audiences – the Youth and to some extent Newcomers'.

Youth and Newcomers were identified as key recipients:
- The Youth services offering services including counselling, and opportunities to get placed in jobs.
- Calgary Economic Development was noted for doing great work in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, helping to integrate newcomers into the economy
- Immigrant serving agencies, in collaboration with The City's initiatives, host networking events and highlight the successful contribution of newcomers to Calgary's economy.

> "It is, for sure. And that would be another area I would say The City's very strong in. With good communication, and good marketing, lots of ways to find out how to access services. So, I would say a very strong area for The City."
>
> "That piece of programming at The City has been quite useful for our employment teams to liaise with."

"No, we work closely with The City of Calgary Youth Employment Services and we send our clients to them and we, I'm not sure if they actually invite them to some of our workshops and work, but definitely we work closely with them. And the reason we created this service to youth employment [is] because there is that gap and the program is a federally funded program. So, the money comes from Canadian government, the IRCC, so the city serves the population of the city while we only serve those who are, you know, immigrants and refugees. So then that is one difference and that's one extra piece."
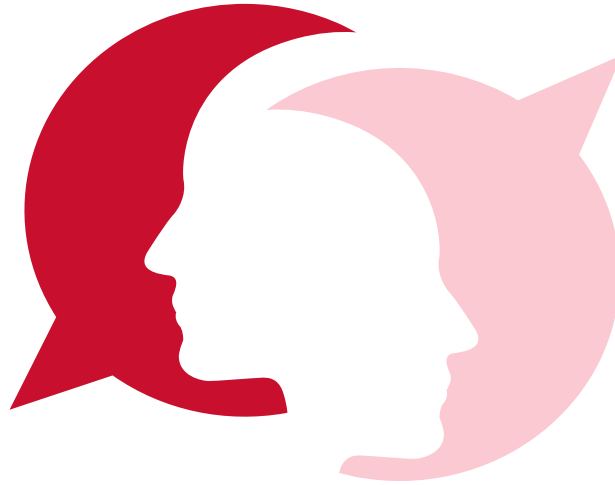
"For example, Calgary Economic Development does really great work in that regard, working with the Chamber of Commerce."

"As well ourselves, as immigrant serving agencies, we do events, networking events together, to gather and come together to show their network."

Barriers and challenges

Participants identified certain barriers, some of which were 'systemic' and needed to be tackled given the diverse changing landscape of Calgary(as well as the country).

- **Lack of Cultural and Linguistic Inclusivity:** There was a concern that employment and other essential services information was not always available in languages other than English. The example given was the 911 information sheet, which was only available in English despite efforts to translate it into Arabic. This indicates a systemic issue where The City's resources may not be reaching all communities effectively due to language barriers.

- **Stigma and education barriers:** There was a perceived stigma around the level of education required for city jobs. People with life experience or vocational training may feel ineligible to apply if they do not have formal degrees. This barrier prevented a range of candidates from considering employment, potentially missing out on valuable experience.

- **Unexpected Service Choices:** Organizations were surprised that a social worker sought ESL support from their program, which caters to adults, rather than approaching the public schools known to offer ESL support for children. This pointed to a lack of awareness or understanding of the educational resources provided by schools.

- **Need for Canadian Job Experience:** Another difficult situation arose for newcomers who needed Canadian job experience to find work but could not gain experience without first having a job. This paradox created a significant barrier to entering the job market and advancing in their careers.

- **Language and Accreditation**: Newcomers often faced long wait times for language assessments and classes necessary for integration and employment. Additionally, the process of getting foreign equivalents was seen to be lengthy, forcing qualified individuals into low-paying "survival jobs" to make ends meet.

- **Limited Employment/Volunteering Services for Other Populations:** While there was a focus on youth employment, there may be insufficient services for other groups like older adults, particularly those with language barriers or mobility issues, which may lead to isolation and limited options for community engagement.

"A lot of them don't know that they're eligible to apply for city jobs because there's a stigma, that you have to have a higher level of education. You have to provide qualifications that a lot of us don't have. We have the life experience but don't have the actual physical paper. So, for example, myself, I went all the way to the end of business administration in management and I was in a car accident in the last three weeks of classes, which knocked me out for my finals. They wouldn't let me write my finals. Didn't get the paper. Got all the education, didn't get the paper. So those kinds of things are a huge barrier when it comes to us accessing employment"
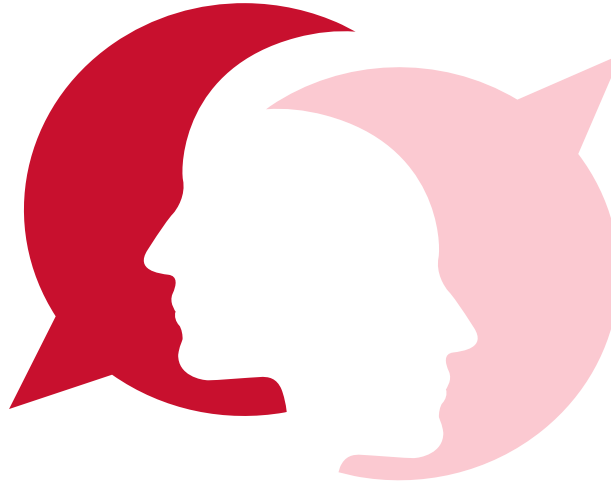
"Everyone has an immigration story, where I have clients who are only coming for job fairs to get into trucking, to get into cab driving, to get into Uber, and they used to be gynecologists. They used to have their own business back home, regardless of where their back home is. So, I know that there are employment programs and they have job fairs. I know that, and The City does a good job. But there's a bigger conversation here, is like, is that enough? Because we're still discriminating against people coming from certain regions of the world by saying that their experience is not credible."

"So one of the challenges is the language. We do currently a long waiting time for clients to do their language assessment and to be enrolled in English classes, which in some cases can take up to six months for a newcomer to start the LINC classes. So this is a big challenge, and in many cases, clients, can't even communicate in basic English, and they mostly need to improve their language capabilities to improve their language. Another challenge for other clients who have good language capabilities or efficiency is their accreditation for regulated jobs."

"What I will say though overall is that there's such a huge stigma again still, because the majority of places that hire, this is not just in Calgary, but even in Calgary it's like you need Canadian experience. And that is so racist. It is not acceptable in 2023 to say that your experience outside of Canada is not okay when we accept it outside, if you're in the US or Europe it's accepted, but if you're in India, Pakistan, or Africa, in an African country, you need Canadian experience."

Suggestions for improvement

Inclusive services for Newcomers and Racialized populations: Shorten wait times for language classes and assessments and assist newcomers with the accreditation process for their international qualifications, develop job placement programs and partnerships that allow newcomers to gain Canadian work experience.

Enhance Cultural and Linguistic Inclusivity: Translate important city communications into multiple languages and ensure they are easily accessible, such as on The City's website and social media. Additionally, consider providing services that support those with limited English proficiency.

Centralize Information and Resources: Build a comprehensive, user-friendly online hub where all city-funded services and resources are consolidated, making it easier for citizens to find the help they need. There is an additional need to build awareness of the full suite of resources for social workers (e.g., those offered by the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) or the Catholic School Board and those about ESL classes). Enhancing awareness could lead to more efficient referrals and support for newcomers and their kids'.

"A website would be good. I don't know how organized they are in terms of, I know it's different departments right? So. But again, it should be holistic. It's not just like, oh, you're a newcomer? You should take English classes. Because they speak English. Then what? They need a job, here's a job fair. Okay, they have a job, then what? That are all the resources you can offer? So, it needs to be more holistic and inclusive, and not just like newcomers can't speak English, or they don't have jobs, because that's kind of where it stops."

"There's not enough money that's going to help them, then you're not going to get the best product. You're going to get bad resumes, bad cover letters. That's not going to get them hired. So yeah, I think that more funding in terms of what that should look like that should look like, in terms of even in job fairs, in terms of… If we just like looked at newcomers and people who are applying for jobs with less bias."

Suggestions for improvement
(continued)

☑ **Educational Pathways for Newcomers:** Create comprehensive guides or instructions that can be digitally shared with newcomers, possibly integrated into English language instruction. These guides would detail the services available, eligibility criteria, and how to access them, ideally using simple language and visual aids to overcome language barriers.

☑ **Provide Adequate Funding and Resources:** Increase funding to existing employment services to ensure they have sufficient resources to offer quality support, like effective resume writing assistance and job search strategies.

☑ **Develop Senior Inclusion Programs:** Create targeted resources and community programs for seniors, including those with language barriers or mobility issues, to reduce isolation and encourage community participation.

☑ **Broaden Employment Services for All Demographics:** Offer employment support for broader demographic groups, including older adults, and the Indigenous communities by creating programs that cater to their specific employment needs.

"

"More Indigenous, either facilitators or recruiters out there, coaches, career coaches that could be helping people to see and go through applications. Applications being more... better, easily worded, the language and also like the internet access. Is the application, you know, is it only online or is it physical? And so, yeah, knowing those kinds of things would help."

"Seniors is a big one. I do not know how to help seniors, especially seniors who have a language barrier. I have no way of supporting them in terms of how they can help in the community. They want to be involved, they want to do volunteer work, or they want to like go somewhere and hang out with other seniors, and we have no place to send them."

"They do have the ESL classes. When my daughter got enrolled on the school's first year. the school always ask what kind of language you speak at home, and they find out whether you will be an ESL student or not. And they do have those programs, provide additional ESL courses or times during the school hours. So, I'm not sure why as a social worker they didn't approach the school. Maybe, like you said, awareness is needed."

Indigenous policy and framework

Overall impressions

- There was a sense among participants that The City has made progress with regards to its Indigenous Policy and Framework and is making efforts to improve its approach towards Indigenous peoples and communities.

- Indigenous Policy and Frameworks were understood as being impactful, used heavily, and continuously updated. However, there was believed to be a lack of Indigenous-led programs and initiatives, as well as an awareness gap. One participant mentioned that awareness of these programs was largely due to "word of mouth" within the Indigenous community, rather than through efforts undertaken by The City.

- While efforts and initiatives by The City were seen as largely positive, they were understood as a "first step," as many acknowledged significant barriers and challenges for Indigenous people and further action that should be taken.

> **"**
>
> *"I don't know much about The City's program in it, but I know there is definitely an effort being made to change things. I think that's a great beginning and first step for it."*
>
> *Yes, 100% [people are aware of Indigenous programming]. But that's Indigenous community, though, [it's] word of mouth. We like to, you know, talk amongst ourselves and recommend."*

Barriers and challenges

Several mentioned barriers and challenges with regards to the Indigenous Policy and Framework, as well as Indigenous programs and services. These barriers and challenges included:
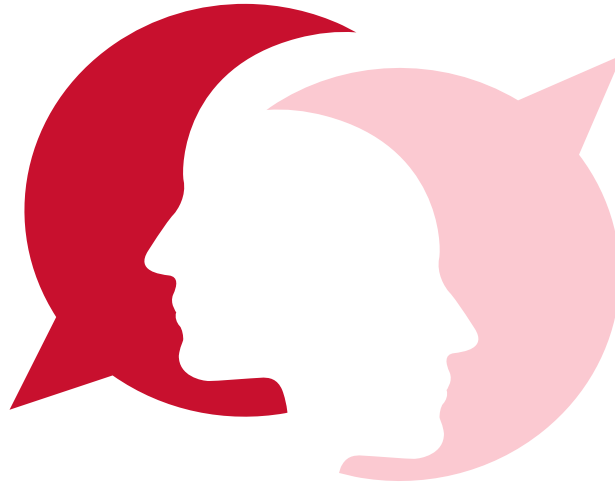
- **Indigenous representation:** Despite the existence of Indigenous programming, participants felt that there was limited Indigenous-led organizations and Indigenous representation in City-led programs and services. This was seen as a barrier to providing programs and services that truly support the needs of Indigenous communities.

- **Targeted programs:** Some felt that many available programs and services did not address the specific needs of Indigenous people, and rather tended to be broader 'one size fits all' models.

- **Information and communication gaps:** Indigenous participants had slightly more knowledge surrounding the Indigenous Policy and Framework; however, it was still limited. They noted a significant knowledge gap throughout Indigenous communities around the Indigenous programs and services offered in Calgary.

- **Funding disparities:** Several felt that funding tended to be directed to non-Indigenous agencies or organizations that provide Indigenous programming, rather than Indigenous-led organizations themselves. This tied into concerns about the lack of Indigenous-led organizations, due to struggles accessing funding.

- **Perceptions of stereotyping and segregation:** one participant expressed concern around segregating and stereotyping that may result from overly emphasizing Indigenous issues and felt that there is a need for respectful integration without excessive emphasis on past wrongdoing or "[dwelling] on the past."

- **"Red Tape:"** some highlighted bureaucratic challenges and delays in Indigenous initiatives, for example building the Indigenous Gathering Place, and the enduring impact of historical trauma.

Barriers and challenges (continued)

"From an Indigenous perspective of saying, is there enough Indigenous-led supports in Calgary? No. When you look at Edmonton, they have like 15 Indigenous-led organizations, where in Calgary there's like five, so like in in terms of a comparison. So, when I'm looking at the Indigenous Policy and Frameworks, I'm very happy to see them being used heavily and updated throughout the FCSS Program, and other areas. However, Indigenous-led initiatives, there are very few and we think there should be more."

"I personally think that we are still stereotyping and making it more of an issue by segregating them out of the rest of the population to say, 'They are entitled to this,' or 'We have to do this.'"

"They just need to skip a lot of the red tape, because to me, I heard about the Indigenous Gathering Place two years ago, which should already be built."

"I mean that boils down to funding going to non-Indigenous agencies where they have Indigenous programming, whether that be the fact that they have a longer standing relationship or a legacy. I find a lot of times an Indigenous-led organization can apply for the same dollars; however, you know, we talks amongst ourselves, and we find out… or dollars are given to non-Indigenous agencies with Indigenous programming. So, I think it's just… fair entry for everyone, you know, and having that trust in Indigenous-led organizations, really."

"They're not Indigenous-specific, they're Indigenous-welcoming, right? So, there's a group that they're going to fall in and we're already an invisible minority and so we get grouped into like BIPOC and stuff like that, right? We don't get to stand out on our own and it really is that we need to be able to hone in on those things that are specific for us and not integrating, not mixing."

Suggestions for improvement

Addressing Indigenous needs and representation
There was an identified need for more Indigenous-led supports, genuine representation and visibility within programs and services. This extended to the desire for services specifically designed for Indigenous communities, and their need for tailored approaches to service delivery.

Improving communication and outreach
To address the limited depth of awareness regarding Indigenous programs and services, participants felt there was a need for enhanced communication and outreach efforts to engage Indigenous communities (e.g., through the use of community consultations or bulletin boards with information on programs and services.)

Empowering Indigenous communities
Several emphasized the need to honor Indigenous traditions and empower Indigenous communities, as well as provide support for Indigenous youth, as a preventative measure to address intergenerational trauma.

"I think it all starts with prevention with the youth, all across the board."

"So then putting [information] out through all of our channels. So like the Native Info Exchange is a good channel here in Calgary. It is all of the like Indigenous or Indigenous focused organizations and their programs, and we share what, you know, what we're doing, what we can access, so on and so forth. So having that kind of, you know, community bulletin board, maybe for Indigenous, you know, like maybe give us given a space that is very visual, attractive and seeing that this is a space for Indigenous, friendly and welcoming for you to apply, you know, attracting them in that sense."

""You get this block of land, here, we're gifting it back to you because you don't go through policies, procedures and writing stuff and do a gift and a verbal agreement. Have a Two Row Wampum belt like they used to have where you share that belt. And that's your agreement. And that would be so respectful if the mayor presented an elder in The City or whoever's going to be overseeing that with the Two Row Wampum belt and said, this is our agreement. We don't, we didn't have paper agreements back in the day. That would be so respectful and honour our people."

Mental health and addiction

Overall impressions

- Overall, there were some points of progress and beneficial services that The City has implemented or supported to address mental health and addiction challenges within the community.

- Some of the things mentioned were:
    - **Collaborative community support and partnering organizations:** There are strong partnerships with city services like CPS (Calgary Police Service) and EMS (Emergency Medical Services) that were described as handling clients compassionately and with respect, likening their treatment to that of a family member. Support organizations like SORCe were mentioned as doing phenomenal work.
    - **Education and Awareness:** The City was also acknowledged for offering education on mental health, via social media campaigns to increase public understanding and reduce stigma.
    - **Mental Health Liaison:** The creation of a mental health liaison position was seen as a proactive step by The City to help individuals navigate the complex mental health system and access necessary supports within the community.
    - **Detox Centers :** Despite there being only three detox centres for a large population, the fact that these centres exist at all, including a new one that just opened, was a positive sign of available support for individuals dealing with addiction.

Although the specifics and the extent of issues vary across categories, there was a need to cater to specific groups like:

- **Youth:** there was an emphasis on prevention services for youth, and concerns were expressed about the scarcity of mental health resources and supports for them.
- **Racialized:** Some mentioned that there was a lack of awareness and cultural competence in city-funded programs dealing with mental health and addiction issues amongst racialized populations.
- **Newcomers:** It was also key to provide mental health support to vulnerable populations, including newcomers, however, significant barriers to accessing these services included long wait times, difficulty in expressing needs, and lack of education about available services.

"
We have some fantastic partners with city services like CPS and EMS that are phenomenal, that are very, very great. They are wonderful with our clients and treat them like they would treat your grandma. They're lovely. Safe consumption at Sheldon. Partners like that with The City are fantastic, and they do, it does make a difference."

"For us, under 18, we don't serve. I think an under 18 population, there needs to be recovery housing for under 18. I would gladly take that on if I had the capacity. But I think what needs to happen because, under 18, you're very, very restricted on what you can do. You have to be careful because they could be running away from home, and their home life isn't stable. They just don't like mom and dad saying you can't smoke pot. And so they, so they leave. But for, I know there's a, there's definite when I was on the street there, there were people on the street as young as 15. And that's, that's heartbreaking. And that goes back to the prevention piece, right? What kind of prevention services are we offering for youth all the way down?"
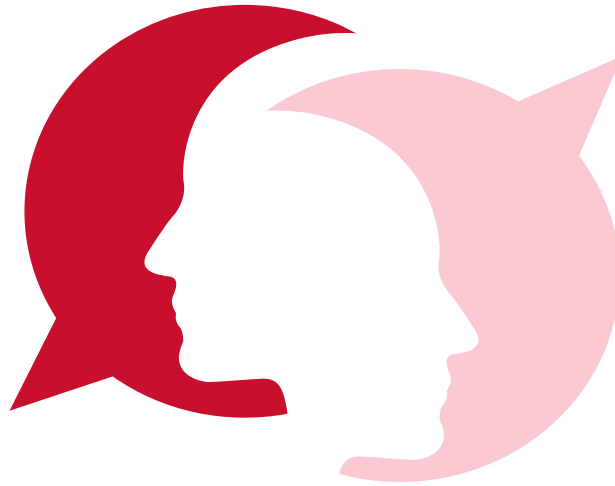
"So, I think breaking that barrier in terms of being like, there are organizations, The City is saying, go to organizations that are related to your culture that work with immigrants or newcomers. Because this is a very real need, and our community is not doing itself justice by not accessing these services."

"Having the clients to express their need as well is another thing. So we need more of education campaign. And we do as well, especially with the pandemic, even if we are after the pandemic somehow, people being impacted by that, specifically cultures who do not have a network. So there need to be as well an expansion of providing mental health services to clients."

Barriers and challenges

Common barriers across participants included:

- **Stigma:** Stigma around mental health and addiction continues to be a significant barrier. This stigma was seen to manifest itself in forms of discrimination, misunderstanding, and a lack of empathy, all of which deterred individuals from seeking help. Many also pointed out that it has many times led to misdiagnosis or dismissal of mental health issues by healthcare professionals.

- **System Complexity:** Organizations as well as their clients struggled to understand the various entry points and pathways through the system. This complexity resulted in people being shuffled between services without receiving appropriate care or falling through the cracks completely.

- **Waitlists for Services:** Due to the wide gap between demand and supply, individuals often faced long waitlists for detox and other mental health services. This barrier was seen to be particularly detrimental for those who were ready to seek help but may lose their resolve while waiting for a spot to open up.

- **Insufficient Accessibility:** Accessibility issues were twofold. Firstly, there weren't enough spots available for those in need. Secondly, people with concurrent mental health and substance use issues were denied services as their problems were misattributed to their drug use, rather than as an interplay of mental health issues.

- **Cultural Competence:** Cultural competence was seen as crucial in providing appropriate care, especially in cases of domestic violence. Without an understanding of cultural contexts, first responders and service providers would misinterpret situations or fail to provide the necessary support.

- **Lack of Specific Facilities:** With the closure of specialized mental health facilities, individuals were often sent to general hospitals. These hospitals lacked the specialized staff and resources needed to address mental health issues effectively, leading to premature discharge of patients.

Barriers and challenges (continued)

"Honestly, the mental health piece is such a broken system. It's not just in The City, it's across Canada. It's just very, very broken. For as much as we talk about mental health and that we want to do things for people's mental health, it's broken."

"Honestly, in terms of family violence and domestic violence, I think that's the area that needs most improvement. Because what we're seeing is, there are more, I can only speak for South Asians because that's the area, but I think more immigrants or newcomers to Canada are in the system for domestic violence."

"I think having more services available, and more options for folks, whether it's low-income counselling or low-income supports where people can go. Counselling is very expensive, and a lot of folks can't afford to go if they need to."

"I think that things are not accessible because of shortages. There's no space. But I also think things are not accessible for other factors. Let's say, a big common one that we hear is folks can't get into the hospital for mental health services because they also use drugs. So, instead of thinking it's a mental health thing, they think it's a drug issue."
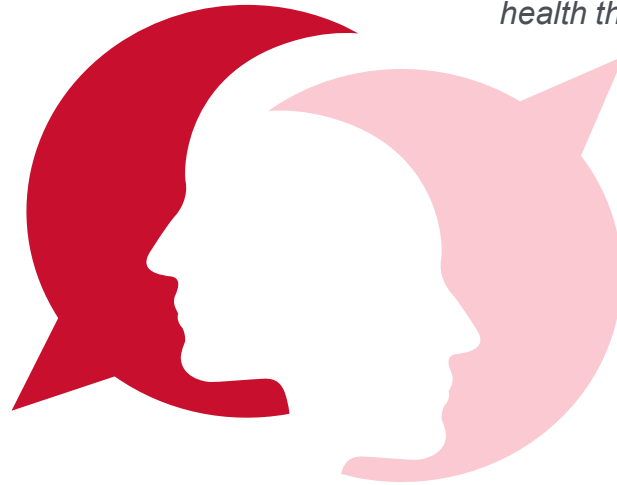
It's a very difficult system to navigate. I think that's a big problem. Do I think anyone is doing anything well with mental health? No, I don't. This system is so difficult to navigate even for healthcare folks that we have here or let alone for the clients if they're trying to, we've got lots of clients who have turned up saying, and when I was there I couldn't get seen by the doctor. The doctor saw me and said I was fine and I could leave, but I wanted to kill myself." I mean, the system is broken."

Suggestions for improvement

Awareness and Education Campaigns: A comprehensive awareness campaign by The City of Calgary could help manage public perceptions of addiction and challenge stereotypes. By showcasing the varied faces of addiction and its prevalence, such a campaign could aim to increase empathy, understanding, and support for individuals struggling with addiction.

Cultural Competence in Service Delivery: The need for cultural competence is deemed crucial when addressing the mental health and addiction needs of diverse populations. It is suggested that service providers be trained to understand and respect cultural differences, which can influence how individuals perceive and interact with the healthcare system. This involves not only language translation services but also an awareness of cultural norms and values that can affect treatment and care.

Funding for Harm Reduction: Harm reduction programs like Safe Works play a vital role in supporting individuals with addictions and preventing the spread of diseases. More funding for these programs would allow them to expand their services, reach more people, and reduce the harm associated with drug use. This could require a commitment from various levels of government and recognition of the importance of harm reduction in public health strategies.

Affordability and Accessibility of Services: By increasing the availability of affordable counselling options and support services, more people could access the help they need. This could involve subsidized mental health programs, sliding scale fees based on income, or even free services provided by the community or government-funded initiatives.

"Honestly, off the top of my head, I would just want more awareness and education, if The City of Calgary for example did a marketing thing, or did an awareness thing, campaign where it was like this is also what addiction looks like. Addiction comes, like you said, not one size fits all. To increase awareness, to be like, you need to capture where those gaps are within your behaviour. Because again, that addiction where we say it's high functioning, that's still going to stream into other issues. It could lead to family violence, it could lead to early childhood adverse childhood experiences. It could lead to a bunch of other things. So, it's like let's stop it at the root cause or build awareness for it. So, I think that and then resources."

"It's not just a language translation issue sometimes. It's like a cultural competence. Because if you're sending someone who has their own bias as your interpreter, and they assess the situation, they say, "I've seen this a million times, it's this," that's their own spin on it. Again, we see that too."

✅ **Detox and Treatment Facilities:** There's a clear call for the opening of more detox centres and treatment facilities. Increased funding for these facilities would help address the immediate need for support for those ready to seek help.

✅ **Incorporating Lived Experience into Education:** The power of personal stories and lived experience in education, especially for youth, could be transformative. Inviting speakers who have dealt with addiction or mental health issues to share their journeys, could provide a relatable and powerful narrative that can influence young people's understanding and choices. Such programs could be integrated into school curricula or community education initiatives.

> *"I think having more services available, and more options for folks, whether it's low-income counselling or low-income supports where people can go. Counseling is very expensive, and a lot of folks can't afford to go if they need to."*
>
> *"Open some detoxes. Open some treatment centres. More funding for organizations that want to do this. More funding for Safe Works. That's also something that we use a lot of here, and it's very needed. Finding Safe Works, agencies that can provide us with more Safe Works, or funding for more Safe Works, things like that. Funding is a huge piece, especially for not-for-profits."*
>
> *And for youth, hearing and seeing it in front of you has more of an impact than reading it in a book or seeing it on the news. Lived experience speakers could do, could go through, I think the education, all children go to school. Well, I don't want to say all, 99% of children go through school. So having somebody come in and present their story or their experience, could alter a lot of lives growing up. I mean, just from stating that the first drug I did was pot."*

Communication with The City

Overall impressions

- From an organizational perspective, participants reported mixed levels and methods of communication.

- Broadly, there was a sense of satisfaction among most in their communication with The City. Multiple participants described The City as being "responsive" and "helpful" throughout their interactions.

- Several key communication channels were mentioned:
  - **City representatives:** many had existing relationships or partnerships with City representatives, which were leveraged frequently. Those with these relationships tended to be most satisfied in their communication with The City.
  - **Committee participation:** some sat on committees or participated in round table discussions, which were seen as providing a welcome opportunity for their voices to be heard.
  - **Email:** a handful of participants had experience communicating with The City and receiving updates via email. These individuals had relatively neutral perceptions of these experiences, although expressed a desire for more frequent updates.

- A minority of participants were less satisfied with their communications with The City or did not know how to provide their feedback to The City. This was particularly true for those who did not have existing relationships or City contacts that could be leveraged.

> ""I don't find [I've] ever have a bad experience with The City, with their employees, ever when it comes to communication, whether it be a phone call, whether it be email, smoke signal. They're pretty responsive, which is helpful."

> "We have a bi-weekly meeting set up with a representative, a City representative who's committed to our organization. And so that is a fantastic communication vehicle for us to raise issues. And that individual is it's not only very supportive of our organization but is really good at pursuing information for us that's outside of his realm, in his role."

> "We worked really closely with The City on initiatives through COVID. That came directly to us. So, we would work directly with someone from The City in order to make those changes, or inform our clients about housing. That was great. I think that works really, really well when we had that one-on-one communication or that contact point with The City on these things."

Barriers and challenges

Most viewed their communication with The City in a positive manner, however there were a couple of challenges identified.

- **Staff turnover:** multiple participants noted difficulties with staff turnover at The City and having to "start from scratch" with individuals who may not be familiar with their organization or clients.

- **Knowledge gap:** several felt that they did not have a comprehensive understanding of available programs and services, making it difficult for them to support their clients to the best ability.

"

"Yeah, and once that person's gone, you're starting over again. Okay, 'so, you know, I talked to so-and-so about this'. 'Well, they're not here anymore'. 'Okay, well can you tell me where it's at?'. 'Well, we don't know'. Okay, well let's start over, and it's just those kinds of things. And again, I don't… they're not alone in this. But if it's one of the things I'd identify, I would say that's an area, a trouble spot."

Suggestions for improvement

Participants offered several suggestions for The City to improve communication with organizations, which included:

☑ **Regular updates:** some expressed a desire for regular email updates addressing relevant services for their respective EDC (e.g., bi-weekly bulletin boards).

☑ **Transparency:** particularly for those who regularly sit on committees or panels, there was a desire for further transparency around how their suggestions will be/are actioned or details around the possible limitations.

☑ **In-person communication:** many felt that in-person communication was the most effective, thus leading to their desire for more in-person communication opportunities or outreach.

☑ **Education team:** given the identified knowledge gap around available programs and services, some felt it would be prudent to have an education team to ensure that organizations can provide comprehensive information to their clients.

"

"My only feedback would be, where do you bridge that gap from those contact persons and then the actual decision making? Because whatever they can tell you, whatever suggestions you give them, eventually it just gets kind of summarized in a report and give it to council, and who knows if council will actually act on any of those reports or those suggestions?"

"I think to have an education team would be really neat, who can come…and not even just for our clients but like, in services for service providers on some of those programs. There really is no avenue to…I guess like to do it through 3-1-1, but again that just doesn't…like as a program manager, I want to speak to another program manager, or somebody who we can partner with"

Suggestions for improvement
(continued)

"Yeah, I think some of those we'll get sometimes through email. I'm not sure we always get everything. So yeah, that would probably be something that, you know, to get more frequent and regular and relevant kind of emails from The City around what services are available for the families that we serve or for us as an agency, would probably be good."

For example, for a provincial level, they will send the email to all the agencies, they build up the meeting every three months, they provide those access for us to know each other and to see the needs to work. And from that point of view, I think city could probably have some better approaches or set up regular updates, or any kind of a channel for us to communicate to work together."
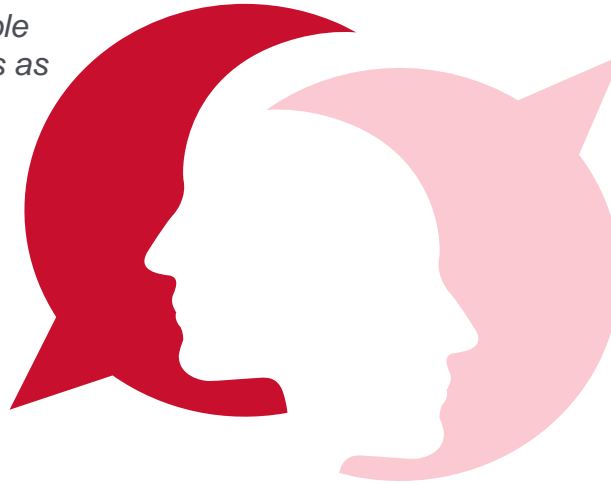
"Maybe more clear communication. Your research is part of it in terms of, let us know. Even us as a participant want to see where our suggestions and recommendation go. And even if The City of Calgary is not being able to, that's my experience in negotiating with certain important things with them. If they are not approved by them, what are the limitations? Whether it's lack of funding, whether it's lack of mentors, or whether it's lack of maybe a more transparent, clear communication in terms of if you are making a recommendation, where are they going? And if they are not being approved, what are the maybe issues going on in The City side? So more clear and transparent communication, I think, will even make us sense as well that, okay, if this has not been happening, so that's the reason."

Communicating directly with EDCs

Nearly all participating organizations identified a knowledge gap among EDCs with regards to the programs and services offered by The City, particularly the wide range of programs and services offered and how to access them. To address this knowledge gap, participants offered several suggestions, including:

☑ **Employing multiple communication methods:** leveraging multiple channels to communicate with EDCs in Calgary (e.g., social media, advertisements, radio, in-person outreach, telephone 'help' lines, and email correspondence).

☑ **Simplifying or streamlining service delivery:** to mitigate the potential difficulties faced navigating online services, it may be beneficial to consider non-digital methods of communication and application processes (e.g., mailing seniors bus passes).

☑ **Follow-up after community engagement:** some felt that it would be beneficial to provide citizens with an electronic "report card" of sorts, that allows them to stay up-to-date with the progression of City initiatives.

☑ **Going Beyond Translations:** participants stressed that it is also important to ensure that communication is written in simple language and from the perspective of someone who may not have a baseline understanding of 'everyday life' in Canada. For example, the concept of municipal versus provincial versus federal government can be confusing for newcomers from countries with other political systems.

☑ **Engaging Community Organizations:** leveraging grassroots organizations when disseminating information about available programs and services, would allow them to provide relevant information and resources directly to members of EDCs.

Communicating directly with EDCs
(continued)

"If you're wanting feedback from older adults or folks living with dementia, being able to have a phone line that is monitored by a real person that does not have any menu, that you are talking to a live person, that is a really huge way to remove barriers."

"Our contract specialist certainly keeps us informed of things going on in The City and reaches out. And that's really helpful. I mentioned that the community social workers work closely with my staff. And so for sure, when we're rolling out things in communities where there's a social worker, we can kind of coordinate our activities in that way as well."

"I think you could always do some kind of electronic communication out around, 'Hey, do you remember in January we talked about these five things? It's May, we just want to update you on where we're at.'… almost a report card back to the community."
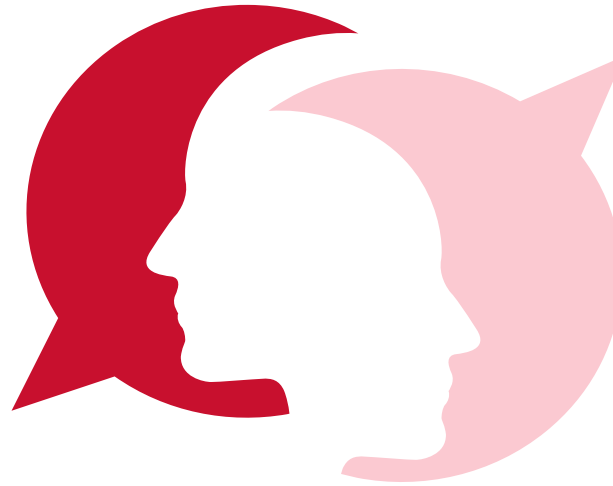
"Or if we know these folks are receiving that, can it just be mailed out to them? Is there a way to move…online can be really hard for older adults as well."

"I think communication through social media, including commercials on TV. I think if they did, say you had a mental health hotline that The City is providing services, put it on a bus. That's a moving billboard that's traveling around. Everybody sees it, the people that are driving, the homeless, everything. When it's parked, it's just, to me, I think it's just a better way to do it."

Implications

Recommendations to serve across EDCs through cross collaboration

Some of the ways The City can better support equity deserving communities through cross-collaboration of various services are:

☑ **Coordination between services:** maintain some level of coordination between various programs and services to ensure accessibility.
- For example, while The City is providing affordable housing options, it is necessary to ensure that these are easily accessed by transit (as some people could be heavily reliant on the same) and other modes of transportation.
- Similarly, housing options for seniors need to be accessible as well as in the vicinity of the recreational programs/activities, for them to feel included and engaged.

☑ **Resource sharing:** explore the potential for supporting organizations through non-financial means, such as resource sharing. For example:
- Utilizing Calgary Transit vehicles to shuttle older adults to programming, or providing organizations with mental health or social workers that are employed by The City.
- Utilizing public spaces (e.g., libraries) for community engagement, such as hosting events or programs in these spaces, and partnering with community organizations to bring in their clients.
- Collaboration between Fair Entry program and recreational/parks programming to make activities more accessible to those who don't qualify through Fair Entry.
- Using existing community centres like the Genesis Centre for programming for different events across EDCs like diverse cultural backgrounds, people of all ages etc. With the disappearance of community centres, it is deemed important to preserve and utilize these spaces that serve as "hubs" for neighborhoods and ensure there is no paywall deterring access.

"

"What about Calgary Transit? What about them having some of their little feeder buses doing some of our transportation for our members? I have 100-plus people come in [every week]."

"[The Genesis Centre] offers programming for so many folks from different cultural backgrounds and different ages… I think community centres are such an important hub of neighbourhoods, because they are the most easily accessible places for people to go."

"it would be also good if they can create more activities for children, like recreational activities, and not just leave it to those who have qualification through their, Fair Entry or through the regular streams."

Some of the ways The City can better support equity deserving communities through cross-collaboration of various services are:

Collaborating for Impact
- **Consulting with agencies/ community organizations:** Many recommended that The City must engage and consult with those who are already doing the work in the community, and ensure that recommendations from these consultations are prioritized. Collaboration across community agencies can also bring together those impacted to share their ideas.
- **Being adaptable:** There is a need felt for The City to be adaptable to the cultural needs and realities of the communities it serves. It is recommended that this might involving partnering with community-based organizations to understand how to work in different ways and leaning on each other's areas of expertise.
- **Focus on areas of expertise:** Some felt that The City should focus on what it does best and seek help from experts in areas where it lacks expertise. This can ensure "effective" service delivery
- **"Informal" initiatives:** Some initiatives, like partnering with grassroots organizations or rethinking service delivery, doesn't necessarily require substantial funding. These could be prioritized as they can significantly improve support for equity-deserving communities.

"Because the City is all stuck in risk and safety, which makes it sometimes not adaptable to the cultural needs or realities of where a human is. I think some of those unique ways they're able to partner have been successful in some examples that we've seen in the past as well, when there's openness and flexibility to that."

"To me, the problem again is asking the right question to the City and saying to them, what are you really good at? What can you do really well? Do it. And then, when you can't do it really well, find the real expert"

"I think consulting with some of the folks that are doing the work, and even seeing if there can be some collaboration across community agencies to bring people together that are impacted to get their ideas."

Recommendations to serve across EDCs through cross collaboration (continued)

Some of the ways The City can better support equity deserving communities through cross-collaboration of various services are:

"

☑ **Improving system navigation:** Simplify process of navigating different systems in Calgary. This could include creating simple and easy-to understand infographics that helps different EDCs understand the options available for their day-to-day processes.

☑ **Communication:** Ensure agencies and organizations (catering to various EDCs) as well as EDCs are aware of The City's activities and services.
   • Communicating directly with EDCs on a "consistent' basis (via email, events) can help alleviate the workload of these agencies and ensure the community is informed.
   • Increasing visibility of The City's programs and services in community spaces such as community centres, churches etc. can help the heighten awareness amongst the EDCs.

☑ **Hosting information sessions:** Regular workshops, can be effective in disseminating information. These can be organized by different organizations and can include a mix of those who can attend in-person and virtually. This should include information about what services are available, how to access them, and who the services are provided by (e.g., municipal, provincial, federal governments or other organizations).

"When it comes to system navigation, I think helping, creating a better understanding of how the systems work together in Calgary, to really be able to simplify that."

"Also, I think ensuring that community agencies know of the activities. Because again, my team is so busy researching everything else, I don't think it even crosses their mind."

"So, I think hosting information sessions by different organizations, so having a lunch and learn. It could be hybrid, so maybe part of it people could attend virtually or in person."

Contact

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