



BOARD REPORT

REPORT No.: 2026-04

MEETING DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2026

SUBJECT: ORGCODE CONSULTING INC. COMMUNITY REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

REPORT SUMMARY

In the Spring of 2025, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) commissioned OrgCode Consulting Inc. to assess the homelessness service system in the District of Thunder Bay and offer recommendations on how to improve in key areas related to emergency shelters, warming services and encampment response. The final report is now being shared with the Board.

BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) requires all Service Managers to submit a 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan by the Spring of 2026. TBDSSAB commissioned OrgCode Consulting Inc. to offer insights into the homelessness service sector in the District of Thunder Bay to assist with the homelessness section of the 10 Year Plan.

OrgCode Consulting Inc. are internationally recognized leaders in homeless system transformations, leadership development in homeless services, and technical assistance. They have assisted countless communities and organizations to identify areas to improve their service system.

COMMENTS

OrgCode Consulting Inc. assessed the homelessness service system in the District of Thunder Bay through several avenues. This included an analysis of the data, group interviews with homelessness service providers, shadowing of outreach service providers, surveying of homelessness service providers, and a broader District wide survey.

The information provided through these methods resulted in a number of insights and recommendations to improve the homelessness service system in the District of Thunder Bay. These recommendations are included in the OrgCode Consulting Inc. Community report provided as Attachment #1 to this report.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPACT

This report aligns with the current strategic plans of humanizing human services, encouraging advocacy and awareness, and promoting reconciliation and inclusion.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications for TBDSSAB in this report, however the recommendations may lead to future budget considerations in next step planning.

CONCLUSION

This new community report on homelessness is a meaningful step toward compassion, stability, and shared responsibility for homelessness in the District of Thunder Bay. It reflects TBDSSAB's commitment to addressing the root causes of homelessness while providing practical, humane solutions that benefit both those in need and the wider community. Details from this report will be included in TBDSSAB's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

Attachment #1 OrgCode Consulting Inc. Community Report

PREPARED BY:	Aaron Park, Manager, Housing and Homelessness Programs
SIGNATURE	
APPROVED BY	Crystal Simeoni, Director, Integrated Social Services
SIGNATURE	
SUBMITTED BY:	Ken Ranta, Chief Executive Officer

Strengthening Homelessness Responses and Housing Solutions in Thunder Bay District Community Report

Prepared by



January 2026

Executive Summary

As The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) collaborates with the community to co-design the next 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, this review was conducted to identify service gaps, strengths and opportunities for enhancement. The goal is to outline a responsive action plan focused on housing solutions and long-term support systems. TBDSSAB and its partners must be recognized for their leadership, accountability and enhanced alignment with evidence-informed housing-focused and solutions-oriented practices and partnerships.

The TBDSSAB is at an important crossroads of reflecting on the progress achieved over the last decade, while preparing to meet current and future needs. Key priorities include collectively responding to unsheltered homelessness, assessing shelter capacity and service orientation, and identifying requirements for supportive, bridge, transitional and deeply affordable housing. This project aimed to highlight the inherent strengths of the community—the diverse and profoundly dedicated service providers, the relationship-based leadership approach of the TBDSSAB, and a strong foundation of investment into housing solutions by local, Provincial and Federal resources. With this groundwork in place, the District is well-positioned to continue to evolve the community's response.

This work was rooted in the community's unwavering commitment to addressing homelessness and housing instability. Stakeholders consistently described TBDSSAB as accessible and responsive, with strong leadership and meaningful engagement across all staffing levels.

Like many Canadian communities, the following dynamics are evident within the District:

- Increasing and entrenched unsheltered homelessness, including encampments
- Community concern over the severity and increasing visibility of the homelessness crisis
- Deeply invested and professional leadership across the homelessness response and housing system of care

- Strong commitment among service providers for a coordinated homelessness response
Opportunities to enhance targeted supports for prioritized populations such as Indigenous Peoples, those exiting foster care and youth experiencing homelessness

Drawing on local data, interviews and focus groups, along with insights from lived experts and input from over 1,200 community members that responded to a public survey, this assessment reflects a community rich in dedication and potential. It also identifies opportunities for enhanced alignment with evidence-informed practices and impactful transformations to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring in the District.

The recommendations included in this report are organized into four strategic themes:

- **Clarify service pathways for people experiencing housing crises and homelessness:**
 - o Map service user pathways through the homelessness prevention, emergency response and re-housing system of care
 - o Define roles and responsibilities for system stakeholders to increase clarity and enhance partner collaboration
 - o Establish clear community housing support mechanisms and tenant feedback loops
- **Enhance local capacity to support people with complex needs:**
 - o Expand lower barrier housing-focused service, especially in those projects funded by the TBDSSAB
 - o Invest in long-term case management supports and permanent supportive housing options
 - o Strengthen partnerships with health, justice and other stakeholders to enhance multi-disciplinary supports to people with complex, concurrent needs
 - o Use data to guide service delivery and identify barriers to services

- **Actively engage the community:**
 - Develop a proactive communications strategy around homelessness response
 - Implement Community Liaison Committees for focused engagements with community members and neighbours
 - Formalize cross-sector partnerships for shared care planning and data
 - Invest in landlord engagement and relationship management

- **Continue to strengthen partnerships and data-sharing:**
 - Enhance collaboration between Reaching Home Community Entities (Designated Community and Indigenous Homelessness) and the TBDSSAB as the System Manager for Provincial Investments. Provincial and Federal investments in preventing and reducing homelessness must be optimized for collective impact for the people served and the larger community.
 - Lead integrated data-sharing practices across the system of care to ensure that the scope of homelessness, the outcomes achieved and the people served increase transparency, accountability and service integration.
 - Develop a partnership framework amongst community leaders to support system accountability
 - Support Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led responses to promote co-designed policies and housing development
 - Align funding agreements with community goals

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Section 1: Introduction and Purpose

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) has dedicated substantial financial and strategic resources to tackling housing insecurity and homelessness across the District. These initiatives aim to enhance long-term housing stability for community members. As TBDSSAB prepares the next 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan, this project provided an opportunity to reflect on current progress, spot areas for improvement, and build on existing strengths to meet the community's goals of preventing and reducing homelessness among local households.

The landscape of housing and homelessness services has changed for communities across Canada, and the District is no exception. Demand has grown, affordability has worsened, funding models and expectations continue to evolve, and more service providers are entering the space. These pressures are ongoing. The District is also seeing demographic changes, especially among Indigenous people and seniors, along with a rise in visible homelessness and encampments. At the same time, deeply affordable and accessible housing remains in critically short supply.

Commissioned by the TBDSSAB, this report aims to assess the current state of homelessness responses, evaluate system performance and outline a roadmap for housing-focused action. The project emphasizes optimizing investments, improving service coordination, and ensuring accessibility for individuals with complex needs. Throughout the project, key areas of focus included:

- System optimization to better respond to homelessness in a manner that is inclusive, sustainable, culturally appropriate and solution-focused
- Identify current and future housing and support needs
- Aligning strategies and approaches with the unique characteristics, values, and priorities of the District

To approach in this work with a community-centred perspective, the review included a variety of approaches to capture as many voices and perspectives as possible:

- A detailed analysis of local data, including market rental data, Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, By-Name Data, Rent-Geared-to-Income Waitlists, shelter trends and Point In Time Count information
- Twelve key informant interviews with service providers, community partners, as well as system and community leaders
- Shadowing of staff from the TBDSSAB (City and District) and funded organizations throughout the community that are delivering crucial homelessness response and re-housing services
- A service provider focus group/ working session with 15 service providers
- A TBDSSAB staff focus group
- A community-wide survey that captured the current perspectives and values of 1,200+ community members
- Engagement with people with living experience to understand service navigation and support gaps

The resulting recommendations are designed to be actionable, accessible, pragmatic, aligned with TBDSSAB's mandate and supportive of long-term system enhancement. They are also intended to guide decision-making on partnerships, service delivery models and overall system capacity.

Section 2: Examining Current Needs Throughout Thunder Bay District

2.1: Data Review

To understand the current realities of housing and homelessness in the District, multiple data sources were analyzed. Point in Time Counts, By-Name Data, and Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) data each offered essential insight into present conditions and future needs for housing and supports.

Scope of Homelessness Measured by the Point-in-Time Count

Point in Time Counts are one of several data sources used to understand homelessness in Thunder Bay District. The PiT data referenced in this section were collected and reported externally and were not generated or validated by the TBDSSAB as part of this review. As with all single night enumerations, PiT Counts provide a partial and time bound snapshot and do not capture the full scale or year-round dynamics of homelessness. Results are influenced by participation, survey coverage, timing, weather, and where people are staying at the time of the count, particularly for individuals experiencing hidden or episodic homelessness. For these reasons, PiT findings should be interpreted cautiously and not relied on in isolation.

The October 2024 PiT Count, led by the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre and the Lakehead Social Planning Council, identified 557 people experiencing homelessness, compared to 221 people counted in 2021. While this change suggests a substantial increase, it also reflects differences in enumeration approach, partnerships, survey reach, and peer led outreach, alongside a local housing context characterized by rising costs and limited supply. In this report, PiT data are used to provide context for discussion rather than to define the scale of homelessness on their own.

Other local data point to sustained pressure within the homelessness response system, independent of the Point in Time Count. In 2023, HIFIS recorded more than 1,100 unique individuals who accessed homelessness services over the course of the year, indicating demand that extends well beyond a single night snapshot. More recent By Name List data provided by the TBDSSAB reflect a high number of active individuals relative to the number of people being successfully housed, indicating that housing exits are not keeping pace with system demand. Community housing waitlist data further show rising demand and limited turnover, underscoring that the challenges identified in this section are not driven by any single dataset.

Increased Unsheltered Homelessness

The 2024 PiT data paint a stark picture of unsheltered homelessness, which continues to rise despite existing shelter infrastructure. On the night of the count, 22% of respondents were staying in an emergency shelter. However, the increase in unsheltered homelessness was evident:

- 22% of individuals were staying in encampments
- 18% were unsheltered in locations like parks, vehicles, bus shelters, or abandoned buildings
- An estimated 161 individuals were believed to be living in encampments, although only 122 were directly surveyed

These numbers point to both barriers in the system and the potential mismatch between peoples' needs and the service options available to them. Recognizing that for most communities, the number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness tends to exceed the number experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the PiT Count explored respondents' experiences in accessing shelter options. Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents said they had been turned away from shelters, 30% chose not to go because of overcrowding, safety concerns were identified by 35% of respondents, bedbugs and pests were an issue for 16%, or rules limited their ability to use substances, stay with a partner, or keep a pet.

Increased Use of Costly Emergency Services

As is common among people who do not have a home, accessing costly emergency-based health care services increases. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed had visited an emergency department in the past year, often for issues that could have been managed in primary care. For many, the Emergency Room has become the only door still open to people who could not access other crisis response options. Living unsheltered, managing untreated illness, and facing stigma in services all lead to high use of emergency care but poor or limited health outcomes. The strain shows up not only in hospitals but also in the growing presence of encampments and street homelessness across the city. For every Canadian community, housing (and the supports if needed) enhances wellness and treatment outcomes – housing is health care.

Deepening Chronicity and Complexity

Homelessness in Thunder Bay is becoming more complex. Chronic homelessness is defined federally as being homeless for six months or more in the past year or having three or more separate episodes of homelessness in that time, adding up to at least 180 days. In 2021, 58% of PiT Count survey respondents met this definition. By 2024, that number had risen to 73%, with 61% reporting homelessness for more than 18 months. A further 23% were considered episodically homeless, with three or more separate episodes in the past year.

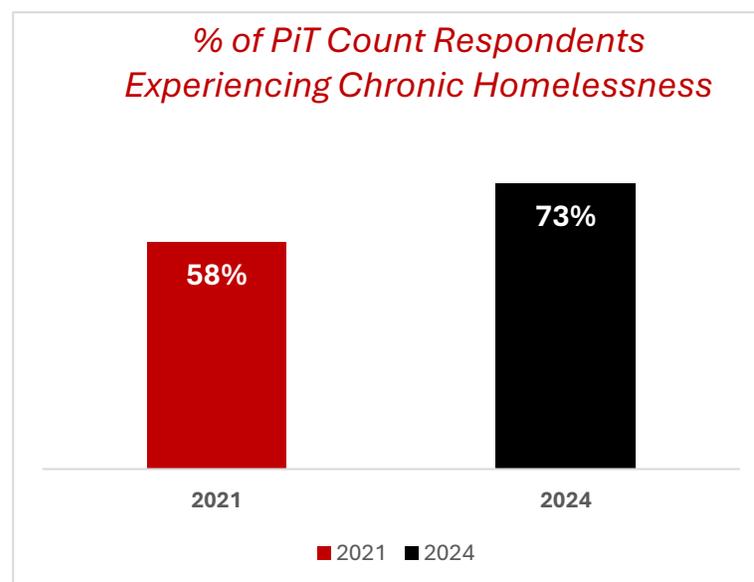
People experiencing homelessness in Thunder Bay are woefully unwell and require accessible and trauma-informed health services. Health needs are also becoming more complex:

- In 2024, 80% of respondents reported substance use, 61% reported mental health concerns, 37% had chronic illnesses, and 23% had acquired brain injuries
- Many reported being treated unfairly in healthcare settings due to substance use (67%), race or ethnicity (63%), and their housing status (55%)

The Role of Foster Care and Early Disconnection

The 2024 PiT Count highlights the ongoing connection between child welfare involvement and later homelessness:

- 43% of respondents had been in foster care or a group home
- 11% became homeless within one year of leaving care
- 29% of former Crown wards said child protection services did not help them transition to independence



These results align with national findings and underscore the need for stronger supports as youth exit care. Without intentional pathways to housing and stability, too many young people are moving directly from the child welfare system into homelessness.

Indigenous Overrepresentation and Migration to Thunder Bay for Services

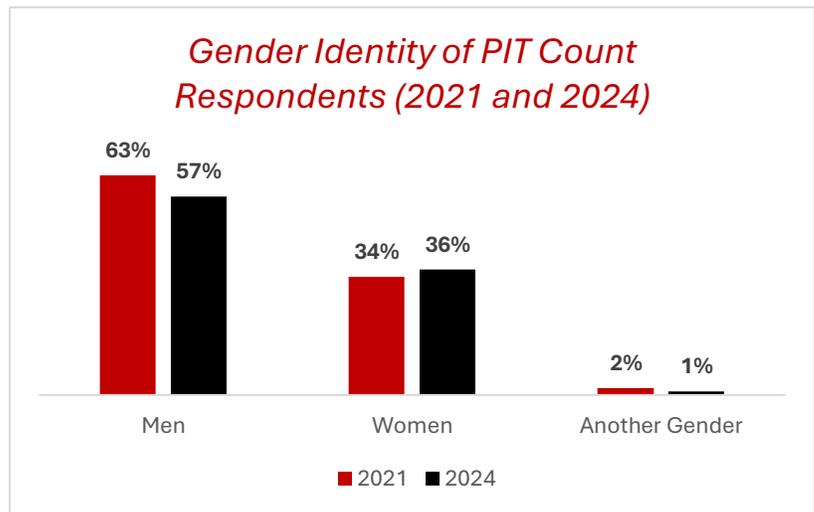
Indigenous people remain significantly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness in Thunder Bay and across Canada. In 2021, 68% of PiT respondents in Thunder Bay identified as Indigenous. By 2024, that share had grown to 78%, while Indigenous people make up just 14.1% of the general population. Most identified as First Nations, with many coming to Thunder Bay from northern communities seeking health care, education, family connection, or other services.

The 2024 PiT report tracked migration from more than 60 communities. The most common points of origin included Winnipeg (25), Fort Frances (15), Sioux Lookout (14), and Long Lac (14). These patterns highlight Thunder Bay’s role as a regional hub and the limited housing options available in smaller or remote communities.

Demographic Profile of People Experiencing Homelessness

The age profile of people surveyed remained largely consistent between 2021 and 2024. In both counts, adults aged 25 to 35 and 36 to 49 made up the majority, accounting for more than 70% of respondents. Youth under 25 represented 11% in 2021 and 6% in 2024, while seniors aged 65 and older accounted for 2% of respondents in 2024.

Gender identity showed a similar pattern across both counts. In 2024, 57 % of respondents identified as men (318 people), 36 % as women (201), 1 % as another gender (6), and 6 % did not respond. In 2021, 63 % identified as men (139 people), 34 % as women (75), 2 % as two-spirit or non-binary (4), and 1 % did not provide a gender identity.



The 2024 PiT also showed that 3% of survey respondents (17) identified as veterans.

Review of Encampment Engagement & Outreach Activities

Beginning in 2023, The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) started tracking the presence and conditions of encampments across key locations in the city. These monthly field reports, developed in collaboration with outreach providers, are still evolving but already highlight the scale of unsheltered homelessness and the shifting dynamics of engagement, service access, and visibility across seasons.

From January to May 2025, the number of tents observed rose sharply from 11 to 38, and the number of people present grew from 9 to 35. Outreach engagement also increased significantly, with 29 individuals interacting with services in May, up from just 5 in January. Across the country, the number of people staying outside increases as the weather gets warmer in spring and early summer. Notably, 22 of the individuals engaged in May identified as Indigenous, consistent with broader patterns observed in local homelessness data.

Table 1. Encampment Monitoring Data, January - August 2025

Month	Tent Count	Individuals Present	Engaged with Outreach	Identified as Indigenous
Jan	11	9	5	1
Feb	6	3	3	2
March	18	12	9	0
April	16	12	9	2
May	38	35	29	22
June	227	143	136	90
July	347	196	168	51
August	110	70	60	31

The Simpson Street area (“Horseshoe”) and Kam River Park were consistent locations across the five months, with the largest encampments recorded in May, including 15 tents and 20 individuals at Simpson alone. Early-month visits often noted that most tents

appeared abandoned or inactive, but as temperatures warmed, outreach teams increasingly documented active occupancy and engagement.

Encampment Engagement Patterns

While field reports show increasing activity and engagement as the weather warmed in 2025, they offer limited insight into why individuals stayed outdoors. Across many visits, outreach teams found tents unoccupied or noted that individuals were not present at the time of contact. When people were on-site, some interacted with outreach teams for basic supplies or conversation, while others chose not to engage. These patterns are common in outdoor settings, where mobility, timing, and personal preference all influence whether contact occurs. Overall, the monitoring reflects how fluid encampment activity can be and highlights the importance of a steady outreach presence, which helps maintain continuity, builds trust over time, and ensures people have a consistent point of connection as their circumstances evolve.

Encampments and Systemic Health Pressures

Unsheltered homelessness is closely tied to serious health risks. In many communities across Canada and the United States, unsheltered homelessness has been identified as a critical public health issue given the higher rates of physical health, mental health and substance use concerns and the substantial costs of emergency health services and hospitalization to meet their needs¹.

The 2024 PiT Count reported that 63% of respondents had visited an emergency room in the past year, often for conditions that could have been managed with proper primary care. That number was even higher among unsheltered individuals and those in encampments.

The May 2025 outreach notes include references to physical health concerns, requests for medical referrals, and attempts to reconnect individuals with care. Despite those

¹ Stas Amato, Flavia Nobay, David Petty Amato, Beau Abar, David Adler, Sick and unsheltered: Homelessness as a major risk factor for emergency care utilization, The American Journal of Emergency Medicine, Volume 37, Issue 3, 2019, Pages 415-420.

efforts, the consistent use of ERs, often as a last resort, underscores the ongoing gap between health care access and housing status.

2025 Housing Waitlist and Placements

Operational data from 2025 shows that demand for community housing in Thunder Bay remains high. The number of households applying for housing continued to grow through the first four months of the year, and the active waitlist remained at a consistently elevated level.

By the end of April 2025, the active housing waitlist included 1,382 applicants, down slightly from a peak of 1,427 in March. While this may appear to reflect a modest decline, it is more likely a sign of waitlist stagnation than relief. Over the first four months of the year, the waitlist remained consistently above 1,380, indicating ongoing demand pressure.

2025 Housing Waitlist and Applicants (Q1 Snapshot)

At the end of the first quarter the active waitlist stood at 1,427 households, with most applicants waiting in the “chronological” stream. Average wait times remain long, with chronological applicants waiting more than 10 months on average.

Table 2: Housing Status of Applicants at the end of Q1 2025:

Current Housing Status	Applicants
Homeless Priority Status	480
Renting	847
Staying with friends/relatives	31
Temporary accommodation	48
Own / Co-own	23

By the end of March 2025, 107 households had been housed through the general waitlist and another 23 had moved into transitional or supportive housing. At the same time, the

number of households on the waitlist remained close to 1,500, reflecting the high level of demand the system is managing.

Applications continued to arrive more quickly than households could be housed, with more than 1,700 unique households recorded by April 2025. Many applicants, particularly those without a priority designation, continued to face long waits. Given the increase witnessed, waitlist numbers at the end of April, 2025 already represents more than 70% of the total recorded across all of 2024. If new applications continue at the same pace, 2025 is on track to surpass any year on record, potentially doubling the volumes seen just a few years ago.

Across Ontario, the most recent province-wide data showed an average wait of 4.4 years for community housing², highlighting the broader pressures that all service managers are navigating. The level of demand early in the year remained higher than the available housing supply.

By-Name Data Trends and System Flow

While Point-in-Time Counts provide a time-bound snapshot of homelessness, By-Name List data offers a complementary view of system dynamics over time. The By-Name List data referenced here were provided by the TBDSSAB and reflect individuals actively known to and engaged with the homelessness response system, rather than a single-night enumeration. In late 2025, this data showed sustained pressure within the system, with new inflow consistently exceeding exits to housing or inactivity.

Across the September to November 2025 reporting period, the By-Name List recorded an average of approximately 900 individuals entering or being newly identified within the system, compared to an average of roughly 125 exits per month. Housing outcomes

² ONPHA and the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. (2019). 2019 Waiting List Survey Report

accounted for fewer than 80 exits per month on average. While each housing placement represents an important and positive outcome, the overall pattern indicates that housing exits were not occurring at a pace sufficient to offset ongoing demand. This imbalance helps explain why pressures observed through shelter use, encampments, and housing waitlists persist even as housing placements continue.

The demographic profile of individuals appearing on the By-Name List during this period mirrors patterns seen elsewhere in the data, including a pronounced gender imbalance, with men representing the majority of identified individuals. The data also show that a comparable number of people were recorded as moving to inactive status as were housed each month. Being marked inactive does not indicate that homelessness has been resolved; rather, it reflects a loss of contact or a pause in active engagement at that point in time. This reinforces the limits of system-based data alone and highlights the importance of understanding lived experience, service navigation, and community perceptions, which are explored further in the community survey findings that follow.

2.2: Community Survey: Perspectives on Homelessness and Housing Instability

Who We Heard From

Over 1,200 community members took the time to share their perspectives in this survey. For a voluntary survey on such a specific topic, this level of participation is exceptional. This strong response signals that housing and homelessness are issues people across the District care deeply about, and it provides a solid foundation for understanding community priorities.

A total of 1,201 people answered the location question, representing communities across the District. The largest share came from City of Thunder Bay (1,102 respondents, 91.8%), followed by Marathon (32 respondents, 2.7%), Shuniah (10 respondents, 0.8%),

Manitouwadge (7 respondents, 0.6%), Oliver Paipoonge (6 respondents, 0.5%), and Nipigon (5 respondents, 0.4%). Smaller numbers came from Neebing, Gorham, Schreiber, Terrace Bay, Red Rock, other municipalities and First Nations communities. This geographic diversity means the findings reflect perspectives from both the urban centre and surrounding areas.

From What Perspective Are You Completing This Survey From?



Respondents brought a wide range of perspectives to the survey. Community members were the most common respondents to the survey (889 respondents, 74.0%) and staff in the housing/homelessness sector (233 respondents, 19.4%), but we also heard from friends or family of someone unhoused (174 respondents, 14.5%), people with lived/living experience (85 respondents, 7.1%), business community members (60 respondents, 5.0%), and representatives of provincial government (32 respondents, 2.7%), city government (18 respondents, 1.5%), and First Nations government (11 respondents, 0.9%). Respondents could select more than one option, capturing the diversity of connection people in relation to housing and homelessness in the community.

In terms of age, participation was strongest among those 50–64 years old (392 respondents, 32.5%), followed by 36–49 years (289 respondents, 24.0%) and 65 years and older (267 respondents, 22.2%). Younger adults also took part, including 188 respondents aged 25–35 (15.6%) and 36 respondents under 25 (3.0%), ensuring younger voices were present.

Gender identity was diverse. The majority identified as woman (860 respondents, 71.6%), followed by man (253 respondents, 21.1%), with smaller proportions identifying as non-binary (13 respondents, 1.1%), Two-Spirit (7 respondents, 0.6%), trans (6 respondents, 0.5%), gender fluid (6 respondents, 0.5%), or gender not listed (4 respondents, 0.3%). Sixty-one respondents (5.1%) preferred not to answer. This range helps ensure the experiences and perspectives in the data are not from one demographic alone.

Finally, length of time living in the District shows the survey reached both established and newer residents. Most have lived here 20+ years (937 respondents, 77.7%), while others have been here 10–19 years (116 respondents, 9.6%), 5–9 years (46 respondents, 3.8%), or 1–4 years (36 respondents, 3.0%). Another 9 respondents (0.7%) have lived here less than one year, 16 respondents (1.3%) preferred not to say, and 45 respondents (3.7%) provided other answers, often related to seasonal residency or frequent moves. This blend of long-term and newer community members adds depth to the insights shared.

Perspectives on Housing and Homelessness

The survey results reveal a community that recognizes the urgency of housing issues, shows strong support in some areas, and reflects divisions in understanding and priorities.

Support for Affordable and Supportive Housing

When asked about having more affordable housing in their neighbourhood, over one-third of respondents (36.6 %) strongly agreed, while just under one-fifth (18.6 percent) strongly disagreed. Many people said they'd welcome more affordable housing nearby, but a sizable group pushed back. It is likely that new housing projects will face some degree of opposition unless trust is built early. Initiatives such as establishing a Community Liaison Committee could help address concerns and build that trust.

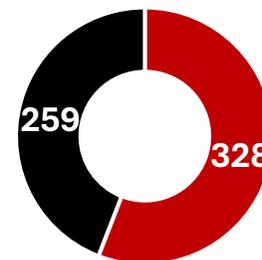
A similar pattern emerged for supportive housing — rental accommodation with 24/7 onsite supports for people with complex needs. In this case, 32.4 percent strongly agreed with having supportive housing in their neighbourhood, while 24.3 percent strongly disagreed. The fact that strong support and strong opposition are close in size highlights the importance of proactive communication and education about supportive housing models. Research demonstrates that many of the beliefs and misinformation that fuel “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY) are not based in reality.³

Housing Stability and Social Support

Just under one-third of respondents (31.3 percent) strongly agreed that they have someone to count on for help if they could not pay rent or faced another housing issue, but nearly one-quarter (24.7 percent) strongly disagreed. This means that one in four respondents have no informal support network to turn to in a crisis — a significant risk factor for housing instability and potential homelessness. Strengthening both formal and informal support systems could be an important prevention strategy.

Views on whether people who are unhoused in the District often move here from other regions were mixed, with 32.1 % strongly agreeing, but over 30 % choosing neutral or mid-range responses. Some see homelessness as a local problem, others think people are moving in from outside. That split shapes whether residents see it as a true local issue, or something imported. As

If there is an issue with my housing, I have someone I can count on for help.



■ Strongly Agree ■ Strongly Disagree

³ As a sample of research that debunks much of the misinformation on Supportive and Affordable Housing, the following documents can be examined: <https://www.bchousing.org/publications/Property-Values-Case-Study-Overview-Report.pdf>; <https://civida.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Exploring-Impacts-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Property-Values-Full-Report-FINAL-1.pdf>; <https://newdawn.ca/wp-content/uploads/Housing-as-Public-Safety-Whitepaper.pdf>; <https://rightathomehousing.com/myth-busting-concerns-affordable-housing/#:~:text=Myth%20%232:%20People%20who%20live,to%20perpetuate%20crime%20is%20false.>; <https://bluedoor.ca/road-home-unjustified-fear-behind-rejection-of-social-housing-in-your-neighbourhood/#:~:text=Crime,.housing%20built%20in%20the%20community.>

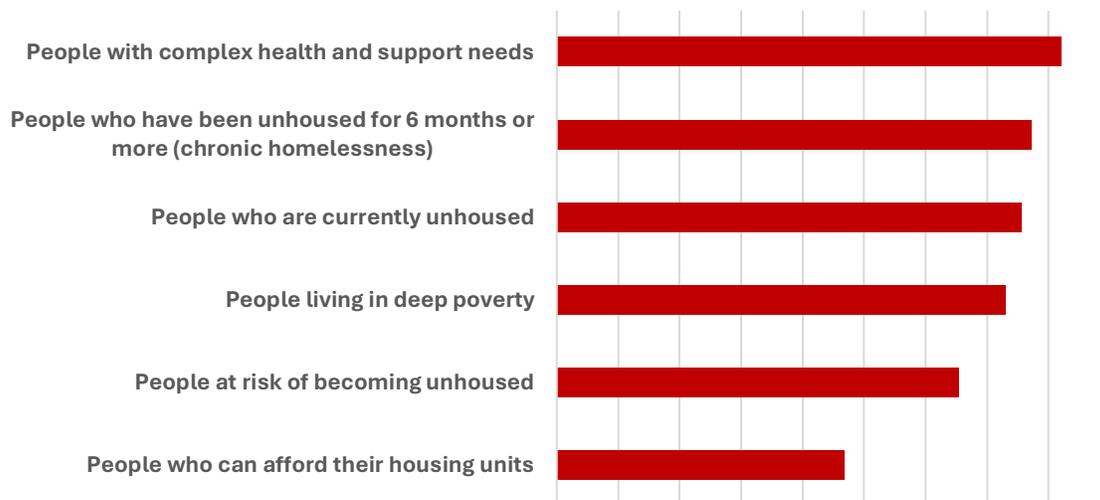
identified in the 2024 Point in Time Count report, most people experiencing homelessness who responded to the survey were indeed from Thunder Bay (92%). Homelessness is indeed a local, home-grown issue.

When asked whether the primary reason people are unhoused is a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, 46% agreed and 32 % disagreed. While the data shows a lean toward recognising housing affordability as a key driver, the lack of consensus suggests some in the community may attribute homelessness to other causes, which could shape support for different policy approaches.

Prioritising Support

Respondents were also asked to rank six different groups of people in order of who should be prioritised for housing and support resources. Each ranking was weighted to create an overall order of preference across the community.

Housing Investment Priorities in the District of Thunder Bay (Average Score)



The group identified as the highest priority for housing investment was people with complex health and support needs, reflecting strong recognition that those facing the greatest barriers require urgent, tailored support. The next highest priorities were people

who have been unhoused for six months or more and those who are currently unhoused, signalling a clear commitment to addressing chronic and ongoing homelessness.

Prioritizing people living in deep poverty for housing ranked second, recognizing that poverty is a key driver of housing instability, though it was not rated quite as highly as people in immediate crises. People at risk of becoming unhoused followed, suggesting that while prevention is valued, the public places a higher priority on responding to those already facing homelessness before investing in prevention.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, people who can afford their housing units were consistently ranked lowest, showing strong consensus that resources should be directed to those experiencing the greatest need.

Service Availability and Urgency

The data shows strong agreement that current services are insufficient. Almost half of the respondents (49.8 percent) strongly disagreed that there are enough services to meet the needs of everyone who is unhoused. Strong disagreement was even higher for specific subgroups: 59.4 percent strongly disagreed that there are adequate supports for unhoused people living with mental illness, and 55.9 percent strongly disagreed for those living with addiction. These figures point to deep gaps in the local service system, particularly for people with complex health needs.

There was also strong agreement about the urgency of the crisis. More than half (56.4 percent) strongly agreed that this is the worst the homelessness crisis has ever been in the District, and nearly half (46.1 percent) strongly agreed that more could be done to support people who are unhoused. One-third (33.1 percent) strongly agreed that unhoused people should be prioritized for vacancies in government-funded housing, showing public support for targeting scarce housing resources to those in the most immediate need.

Housing Realities and Hopes for Change for Respondents

Current Housing Situations

Among the 1,022 people who answered the housing question, 69.6 percent were homeowners (711 respondents), and 12.4 percent were private-market renters on the lease (127 respondents). A further 4.3 percent were renters in government-subsidized housing on the lease (44 respondents), and 4.2 percent preferred not to say (43 respondents). Smaller proportions were in less stable or informal arrangements, including living with a relative (3.7 percent, 38 respondents), renting in the private market without being on the lease (2.4 percent, 25 respondents), couch surfing (0.7 percent, 7 respondents), living in a motel or hotel (0.1 percent, 1 respondent), or currently without housing (0.6 percent, 6 respondents).

Experiences of Housing Instability

Thirteen percent of respondents (133 people) said they had experienced a time without stable housing, while 81.4 percent (831 respondents) said they had not.

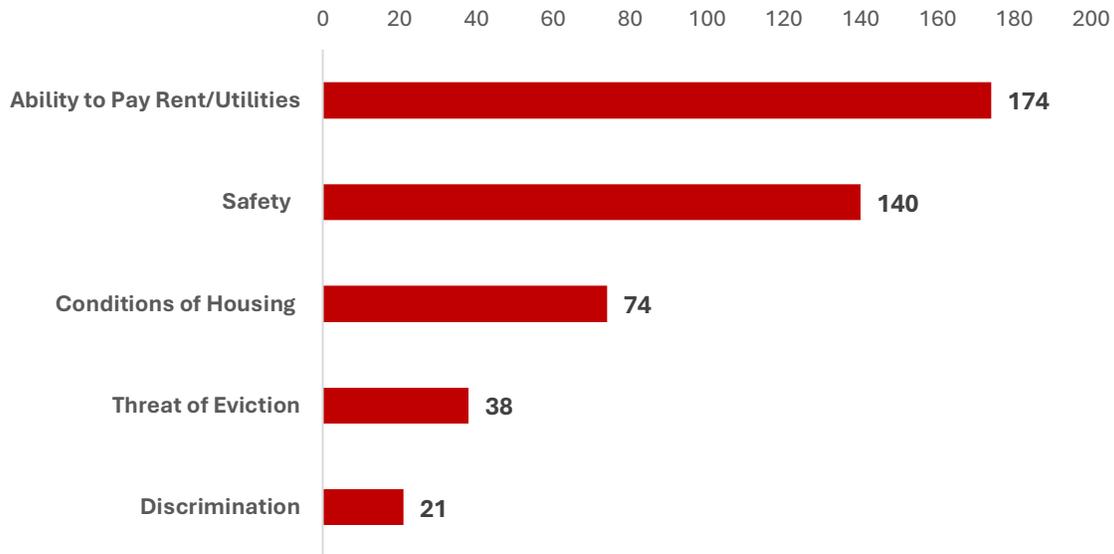
Current Risks and Pressures

When asked if they felt at risk of becoming unhoused in the next 12 months, 5.7 percent (58 respondents) said yes, 8.6 percent (88 respondents) were unsure, and 82.5 percent (843 respondents) said no.

Among the 1,018 people who answered the question about current pressures affecting their ability to keep housing, 650 (63.9 percent) said they had no concerns. The remaining 368 respondents (36.1 percent) identified at least one concern. Among those with concerns, the most common issue was the ability to pay rent or utilities, reported by 47.3 percent (174 respondents). Safety concerns were identified by 38.0 percent (140 respondents), followed by the condition of housing at 20.1 percent (74 respondents). Other concerns included the threat of eviction (10.3 percent, 38 respondents), discrimination (5.7 percent, 21 respondents), and overcrowding (4.9 percent, 18 respondents). Nearly one in four (26.9 percent, 99 respondents) selected "other" and described additional pressures, many of which related to affordability, maintenance, and neighbourhood conditions.

These responses align with broader research showing that even modest rent increases can significantly raise the risk of homelessness. As rents and living costs climb faster than incomes, more households face instability, and the barriers to exiting homelessness grow steeper.⁴

Concerns about current living situation



Confidence in Ability to Demonstrate Progress

On the question of whether the District can make meaningful strides toward solutions, half of the respondents (50.7 percent, 491 people) said yes, 25.6 percent (248 respondents) were unsure, and 23.6 percent (228 respondents) said no. With half of the respondents expressing confidence in the ability to reduce homelessness locally, the quest to improve communication about efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness will likely garner ongoing community support.

Community Perspectives on Solutions and Priorities

This section draws on a deep thematic analysis of all written responses to the three open-ended survey questions. More than 1,400 individual comments were reviewed in full, grouped into themes, and coded to identify the most common ideas and priorities. The

⁴ <https://endhomelessness.org/blog/rising-rents-and-inflation-are-likely-increasing-low-income-families-risk-of-homelessness/>

quotes included here are drawn directly from respondents' answers and reflect the range of perspectives and lived experiences shared.

Ideas for Housing and Supporting People Who Are Unhoused

When asked for their best ideas to house and support people who are unhoused, respondents most often called for more housing — especially deeply affordable and rent-g geared-to-income units (459 mentions). Suggestions included supportive housing, smaller community-scale developments, modular or tiny-home models, and partnerships with non-profits to speed delivery.

“Without actual affordable housing, everything else is just treading water.”

“Build small, supported homes so people can live with dignity and stability.”

Expanding mental health and addictions supports was the next most common theme (350 mentions), with many pointing to the need for more treatment capacity, harm reduction services, detox beds, and integrated health supports tied directly to housing.

“You can't expect people to get well if they don't have a safe place to sleep.”

Other priorities included employment and training opportunities (202 mentions) to help people build income stability; more supportive and transitional housing (172 mentions) for those needing structured help before living independently; and shelter improvements (126 mentions) to increase capacity, safety, and accessibility.

Respondents also raised encampment management (122 mentions), with some calling for designated, serviced areas and others urging stricter limits — often paired with a call for more housing options. Finally, policy and systems change (123 mentions) focused on sustained funding, stronger tenant protections, and clearer accountability across governments.

What Is Working Well in the Current Response

When asked about what is working well, the most frequent response celebrated dedicated staff and volunteers (88 mentions) whose persistence, trust-building, and advocacy make a tangible difference.

“The people on the front lines genuinely care — they don't give up on you.”

Respondents also highlighted specific programs and services (76 mentions) that are accessible, responsive, and effective; housing initiatives underway (51 mentions) that have created new units or placed people successfully; and outreach and harm reduction services (46 mentions) that meet people where they are. Some also noted collaboration between agencies (29 mentions) as a positive step toward a more coordinated system.

“The outreach teams have saved lives — plain and simple.”

Final Reflections

At the end of the survey, we asked: *“Do you have any final thoughts on this topic that you would like to share?”* The answers show just how divided and passionate the community is about housing and homelessness.

Some people used this space to repeat what came up earlier: the need for more housing, stronger mental health and addictions supports, and better coordination between agencies.

As one respondent wrote, *“Housing is a human right and should be treated accordingly.”*

Another put it simply: *“Relationship, relationship, relationship.”*

Others urged that supports focus on rehabilitation and independence.

There were also strong concerns about safety and encampments. Several respondents described frustration with tents in parks, near homes, and in public spaces, and called for stricter limits unless designated sites or more housing options are provided. For some, the presence of encampments was enough to make them consider leaving their neighbourhood. One comment captured the tension:

“Find a safe place for people, away from public spaces, so they can live with dignity.”

Several comments were sharply critical of the government, survey design, and current harm reduction strategies. These voices expressed concern that resources might be mismanaged or that policies could be worsening the situation. Meanwhile, others welcomed the survey as a sign that change might be on the horizon and urged leaders to follow through. One person said, *“I am pleased this survey has been generated. It is so important that we are moving towards taking care of our unhoused population.”*

Section 3: System Enhancements

Data and Outcomes-Driven Approach

A data-driven, outcomes-based approach is essential for building flexible, effective responses to homelessness. Using evidence-informed decisions, tracking impact, and adapting interventions through short cycles of incremental change ensures progress toward ending homelessness. Data must serve as a continuous reference point for communities, creating a shared language and accountability. To improve the data-driven outcomes-based approach in Thunder Bay:

- since two distinct Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) are operating in the community, system leaders (and HMIS administrators) are encouraged to identify mechanisms and processes to share, validate and exchange feedback to clarify data realities for the whole community and amplify each other's work. Data inconsistencies regarding the scope and realities of homelessness hamper progress.

- access to real-time person-specific quality data
- consistent data collection policy with operational protocols to match and support front-line service providers
- an integration of data into system-planning discussions to understand progress and evaluate the need to tailor or develop strategies regarding partnerships, pilots, policy, program planning, and investment
- an integration of data into front-line service planning and regular team meetings to evaluate the need to adjust service delivery

Planning for the next 10 years is a crucial time to identify opportunities for improved data sharing. Such a commitment will ensure trauma-informed approaches for participants and a less fragmented homelessness response system for staff who are identifying the current challenges of operating within two data systems.

To advance collaborative data-sharing options, the TBDSSAB is encouraged to involve the two Reaching Home Community Entities in their consent processes and share data openly with them, especially regarding Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tools (SPDATs) and emergency shelter data. Implementing a detailed data-sharing process with these Community Entities during their regular meetings would enable accuracy checks. Since encampment response is a current community priority, data should also be shared at the operational level through the Outreach working group. Bringing front-line workers into this process, at the level where they are already engaged, will equip them with the necessary tools and detailed information to plan responses effectively. Leadership will be needed to coordinate data use among front-line staff at existing forums and to demonstrate how data can be cross-referenced and leveraged to meet outcomes. As the primary funder of Emergency Shelters across the community, the TBDSSAB can utilize the current Emergency Shelter Communication meetings to promote this approach and to operationalize data enhancement and optimization. This might involve creating Terms of Reference centred on establishing a continuous improvement focus on data and implementing short cycles of incremental change across service providers. Such actions allow for piloting this approach and demonstrating success in

how case management and consistent data collection and sharing intersect. An open data-sharing stance from the TBDSSAB can lead to measurable success through data use and refinement within a specific area. Building this coalition around data for those directly involved will increase demand for more accurate information.

The impacts of data siloing and fragmentation are felt at every level of the homelessness response system. Making decisions becomes more difficult as the true accuracy of data is questionable. Service providers experience burnout and frustration due to multiple layers of entering data and a lack of consistency in expectations. People with lived experience are not currently navigating a trauma-informed system, which likely leads to longer durations of homelessness. For example, staff need a data sharing platform to overcome a lack of real-time access to crucial client information, such as location, connections, SPDAT scores, and consent status. This would reduce duplicated work, enable more efficient conversations, and facilitate trauma-informed care by allowing staff to quickly see the full picture of a client's situation. It's not currently unusual for participants to complete up to three SPDATs across community organizations due to the lack of information-sharing. While access to this information can be requested, providers and front-line staff discussed the absence of formalized pathways supporting this exchange. This information gathering was also not integrated into their case management workflow or shared care planning. Information sharing through common and inclusive consents and structured care conferencing processes is essential for an effective and trauma-informed system. A data-driven approach for the district must address these challenges directly and focus on key priorities such as system data clean-up of encampments, SPDATs, and emergency shelter data. This will prevent households from having to repeat their stories, improve and guide case management, and enable measurement of change over time while highlighting the great work happening across the District.

Optimizing Data for Investment Decisions

Empowering and facilitating an open and consistent approach to data throughout the community, while making clear links to how it influences decision-making and aligning

with the CE community priorities, will be crucial in how the TBDSSAB engages with service providers. Part of this will be demonstrating why certain decisions are being made and how the use of data will also allow for a better understanding of types of units required and required policy shifts. In the District, considering the high representation of Indigenous people experiencing homelessness in the community, having multi-generational units for chosen and/or street family is important. This information also allows the District to adjust policies in the spaces they fund and operate to ensure that guest policies are trauma-informed and that spaces are offered for extended and chosen families. The housing choices in the community must be representative of the individuals they serve. Indigenous organizations are key partners within this work and must be empowered to build the housing that they know individuals require, paired with the appropriate intensity of supports. Empowering these organizations to build different kinds of units will be key. These culturally appropriate supports are not just for long-term housing solutions but must similarly be embedded in services to those in encampments and shelters. Throughout discussions with service providers, it was acknowledged that the disproportionate and systemic homelessness was a direct result of colonization.

Continue to Improve Funding and Administration Structures

The TBDSSAB has established structures to anchor the homelessness response system in an outcomes-based approach. The Homelessness Prevention Program Investment Plan addresses concerns such as:

- Housing stability
- Reduction in chronic homelessness
- Support for priority populations
- The use of By-Name Data to connect service users to services and supports
- The use of By-Name Data to track progress in addressing homelessness

This focus for the Investment Plan is commendable and moves the community forward towards realizing real gains to prevent and reduce homelessness. Continuing this work by aligning funding agreements and reporting structures between the TBDSSAB and funded organizations will be important. The reviewed reporting templates focused on the number of people served and the household characteristics of those people. Such an output-based reporting approach can reduce the focus on outcomes (sustained exits from homelessness, etc.) and housing-focused approaches. As an example, shelter operators may receive mixed messages that confuse the true mandate of sheltering – creating a pathway back to housing. When operating funding is believed to be tied to the number of people staying in shelter beds, it establishes a barrier to being housing-focused, even when case managers are funded to work with shelter guests to resolve their homelessness. An outcomes-based reporting approach tied to funding agreements would be in line with a commitment to housing-focused and evidence-informed practices that have proven to reduce homelessness. In conversations with providers, it was also clear that the “right to housing” philosophy was paramount and primary as a building block of their approach. This is what they envisioned for Thunder Bay District. Ensuring that agreements align with housing-focused resolutions to homelessness would create synergy between the values of the organizations and the direction of the community.

Prioritize Permanent Housing with Wrap-Around Supports

While the community spent the last few years building up their stock of transitional housing, the upcoming focus on permanent housing options for the TBDSSAB pipeline of units is welcome and important. For every transitional housing unit, the District must consider how often the units should be turning over on an annual basis (depending on lease agreements and program structure) and what percentage of those individuals will require permanent housing (vs other options like Long Term Care). The District's planning for permanent supportive housing must be rooted in this calculation to ensure proper move-on strategies and appropriate turnover to ensure units serve their stated purpose. Thus, ensuring a consistent and unwavering focus on these permanent options will be

paramount. Permanent supportive housing was also a consistent theme in the community survey, with community members seeing the value of deep, longer term and on-site supports.

Additionally, housing solutions like deep rent supplements or new units for those exiting chronic homelessness must be paired with long-term case management and operational funding. Individuals placed in these dedicated units must be supported in establishing the life skills and social integration required for long-term housing retention. Across all interviews within the District, intensive case management delivery was seen as one of the most significant service gaps impacting system bottlenecks and long-term housing stability. This was seen as a crucial barrier for service providers.

System Leadership Recommendations

Thunder Bay District is made unique through leadership from several different bodies when it comes to the homelessness response system. The alignment and coordination of these will guide the continued success of services delivered to those experiencing homelessness in the District through collective impact. To direct this work, leaders are encouraged to clarify how they will work together, problem-solve and make decisions. This provides structure not only for system response but also for service providers to understand how leaders are collaborating on a community approach. Similarly, clear approaches to data-sharing and data impacts will also outline how the community is moving forward together despite two HMIS platforms. Reducing ambiguity as much as possible, both through extensive data sharing models, particularly around community priorities, will be important and then further expanding transparency into how this data is driving decision-making. This level of rootedness in data can help guide conversations with service providers around community vision. The data currently shows a concerted need for Indigenous-specific initiatives, permanent housing and long-term case management support options— continued efforts toward this would demonstrate the above.

To strengthen services through data-driven, evidence-informed decision-making, the system would be supported by:

- Defining and clarifying community leadership processes for homelessness response
- Prioritizing establishing data sharing models rooted in community values and priorities
- Strengthening responses that are Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led by addressing system partnerships, types of units built and how policies are co-designed and implemented
- Aligning reporting structures with system goals
- Expanding permanent housing and supports throughout the District

Housing and Support Needs: Estimating Demands

This set of estimates for Thunder Bay District provides a foundation for the rest of the recommendations embedded throughout the report. It creates a framework for future planning for the District's future and outlines the housing and support capacity required to continually address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. While anchored in a multitude of data sources provided by the District and its partners, the estimates look ahead from the community's current reality and establish a roadmap for future action.

At a minimum, the Thunder Bay District needs 840 net new units of specific types of housing by the end of 2030 to achieve reductions in homelessness to the point of realizing effective outflow from the homelessness response system. Failure to realize this target will have a compounding impact on future years. In other words, delaying action is likely to result in more units being required in the future and an ongoing upward trajectory in the number of people and households experiencing homelessness.

New Units	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Totals
Rent-geared-to-income (community/ social housing)	80	100	75	60	50	365

Scattered site with ICM or ACT supports (rental subsidies required to make deeply affordable, acquisition with minor carrying and renovation costs, or new construction to make deeply affordable)	25	25	25	25	25	125
Site-based Bridge Housing	25	25	0	0	0	50
Site-based Transitional Housing	0	20	30	0	0	50
Site-based Supportive Housing	80	80	40	30	20	250
TOTAL	210	230	170	115	95	840

Section 4: Operational Enhancements

Community Engagement and Communication

As mentioned in the community survey analysis, the issue of housing and homelessness is clearly top of mind for residents of Thunder Bay District. The survey turn-out was significant as well as the rate of completion and the engagement in the qualitative responses. Community residents are deeply invested in what homelessness looks like and what interventions community leaders are putting in place. In this community survey and throughout many conversations with front-line staff, it was clear that the concerns individuals had were multi-faceted but often arose out of a lack of information. The sentiments in the community were often described as black and white and lacking nuance. Attitudes were also noted as being “resentful”, “aggressive” and “lacking empathy” in various interviews. These positions were often aimed at individuals and not system-issues although the community survey saw a balance of both.

Residents across Thunder Bay District are deeply invested in the state of homelessness in their community. They are eager to contribute, and their voices must be allowed to take up a productive and action-focused space. While providing information to all individuals on community response and strategy around homelessness is valuable for a preventative approach to narrative building, different depths of community engagement must be

targeted towards different subsections of residents. The District is encouraged to do this through the following recommendations:

- **Develop and launch a proactive homelessness response communications strategy**

Ideally, the District (and the other system leaders) should be proactive in the development of community narrative, not reacting to narratives that already exist. Ensure that a communications strategy is rooted in the realities of homelessness based on data to address ongoing myths and counter stigma, that successes are celebrated and actions clearly spelled out, for the District and its residents. Moving away from crisis response and towards a strategic and consistent visioning and communication is recommended. Residents must know what is happening, why, when, how they can participate and what is working through data and factual information. Ensure that the strategy is aligned with community values and previously done consultation such as the community survey.

- **Optimize Community Liaison Committees for contested developments or ongoing services**

CLCs deliver an opportunity to engage to those are more involved and vocal in the community to increase trust around new developments and lean into risk management through proactive community engagement. They can also be utilized for spaces that are currently highly contested in the community to lower tensions and reduce negative publicity by building bridges between neighbours, residents and staff.

Strengthen Encampment Response

Encampment response was top of mind throughout OrgCode's engagement in Thunder Bay District. The prevalence of encampments, their growth and lack of outflow from encampments were of utmost priority throughout the community. It was a topic discussed in every conversation and brought up across stakeholder types. All interviewed

participants mentioned the increase in encampments and the size of the encampments as an immediate and acute concern. Throughout OrgCode's time in the District, staff visited encampments to shadow providers and to understand processes and engagement strategies. There were also opportunities to hear from people staying in encampments to unpack the support pathways they've experienced and their journeys to and throughout unsheltered homelessness.

Consistent encampment approaches will provide clarity and consistency for the community, service providers and people in need. The community is calling out for this leadership and the TBDSSAB is well positioned to respond and bring providers together around a common approach and consistent response. Any response must be rooted in a rights-based and housing-focused foundation and must be sustained over time.

- **Develop Thunder Bay District Encampment Service Standards**

Taking on a leadership role to develop and put into action community-wide housing-focused encampment service standards detailing how services are delivered would allow for a pooling of resources, an alignment of priorities and actively engaging with individuals through assertive engagement and offering them solutions to come indoors as quickly as possible. While the City of Thunder Bay is looking to ensure that all community partners are brought together, the District is well-positioned to provide system leadership around a clear scope and process for getting the work done. A coordinated and intensive response is key to see results. The monitoring of that work would allow for messaging to be distributed to the community and demonstrate concerted community action towards sustainable encampment response and long-term housing strategies.

- **Ensure community response to encampments is housing-focused**

Shifting away from a survival response to a housing-focused response will allow for an approach that is active and respects the dignity of individuals. Housing as the long-term solution must be the response for people living in encampments, with adequate survival supports provided as needed. This would entail training for staff, housing plan templates, an increase in time spent in encampments for staff, prioritization in the support of

encampment residents and a growth in capacity to provide all supports (including income assistance on-site).

- **Evaluate shelter access and barriers**

Understanding the barriers to access for individuals that are choosing to avoid shelter will be crucial in both building relationship with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness but also bringing them indoors. Whether it is service restrictions or high-barrier rules, unpacking what is keeping shelter use low in the community is an important step to addressing encampments.

- **Deepen encampment data collection**

Ensuring that encampment residents are being supported through informed consent conversations and then being included in an HMIS will allow the TBDSSAB and the community at large to have a clearer picture of the current situation in regard to encampments. Clear and real-time information also allows for more accurate decision-making and resource deployment, and a better understanding of changes in encampments and any emerging trends.

Standardize Pathways through Services

Part of high-functioning homelessness response is a clear understanding of the flow and experience of individuals from their first touchpoint with the homelessness response system. This utmost clarity around referral processes, points of contact, roles and responsibilities is crucial for providers, individuals and the community. Currently, more understanding and mapping is required when it comes to the experiences of individuals with the system and which providers are responsible for which portion of this experience.

Service providers and their clients must have a clear understanding of service pathways through the District to end or prevent their homelessness. This understanding should extend from what happens when someone first engages with the homelessness response system, what their case management support will look like and which providers are

responsible for this support. The District has many of the crucial pieces of the puzzle in place. Now, it's about creating alignment, consistency and clarity within this structure.

- **Standardize and formalize homelessness prevention and shelter diversion**

Creating strong protocols and processes built into staff workflow is crucial for both District and City staff, considering the geographical location of Thunder Bay. This can include homelessness prevention and shelter diversion training for staff, a broad range of resources to support family reconnection and landlord mediation, and financial resources as well. Having strong practices, protocols and resources in place will allow the District to slow the inflow of individuals into sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. It's paramount that these practices are Indigenous-focused and integrated into the work already happening through the Indigenous Community Entity and other partnerships in place through the TBDSSAB, such as Urban Native Housing units and transitional and supportive housing partnerships.

- **Invest in strong data collection processes for homelessness inflow and prevention/diversion work**

Collecting data at the point of access and as individuals figure out solutions and alternatives to shelter will allow the District to use that data to create strong and preventative linkages with the systems and communities from which people are arriving. This entails strong partnership development through a nimble and adaptive approach as trends shift over time. Collected data can also be used to demonstrate prevention outcomes across the community.

- **Prioritize upstream prevention through community task forces and targeted partnerships**

The data in the District points to a significant need for innovative partnerships with child welfare and how to support youth aging out of foster care. Considering this and other opportunities for upstream prevention will allow for a path forward and more preventative approaches. Ensuring that these types of partnerships are formalized and shared care is instituted will ensure collaborative planning.

- **Review the alignment of resources and levels of need**

Develop a clear understanding in the community of what resources are connected to what depth of support needed, in particular through alignment with the SPDAT. This will provide direction for service providers and clarity in terms of system flow.

- **Focus the scope of TBDSSAB TOSW staff**

Ensure that TOSW staff understand what role they are playing in the grand scheme of system response and at what point in people's journeys they provide support, and until when. Providing this clarity allows TOSW workers to focus on their role, develop strategic attention towards their portion of the system's work and give them more time to thoroughly support the individuals on their caseloads.

- **Complete system mapping in collaboration with partners**

Consistency was also required amongst the roles of stakeholder partners to understand their role within the strategic homelessness response. Unpacking who completes what work, when and how will also help providers highlight gaps and/ or duplications. Establish community definitions for what each type of provider does, how and when.

Aligning Community Resources

Value alignment and collaboration within the housing and homelessness sector were identified as community strengths throughout all interviews. Organizations were noted as working well together and wanting to formalize their collaboration. They came with a desire to work together and support one another. Organizations felt that they could count on one another and that pathways existed for support, although they were not formalized. With this as a foundation, providers were consistently looking for a concrete and strategic vision and, most importantly, leadership. Providers also knew that solutions were never going to be monolithic or global—that there was no silver bullet. However, all were motivated and believed there was a way forward with strong and concerted leadership. The need for a strategic community vision was seen as paramount.

TBDSSAB has strong community connections and service providers that are well embedded in the community fabric of social services. They value each other and each other's contributions. To deepen this work, relationships need to be taken from the level of individual relationships to system partnerships. This applies not just to social service organizations but also landlords and affects how these relationships are engaged, maintained and nurtured. Overall, providers were looking for strong strategic leadership when it came to partnership and TBDSSAB is ideally positioned to lead this work. As well, as data collection increases on the part of the District and more disaggregated data is available on demographics, trends and inflow/outflow, it'll be crucial to use this information strategically to determine future partnership development and any taskforces that may need to come together in the community. To invest into this direction, the following recommendations would be of benefit:

- **Identify and formalize community partnerships**

Ensure that the partners that work closest with the homelessness and housing sector are clearly identified and engaged in an MOU process that outlines how the sectors work together, how they check in about systemic challenges, how care conferencing is completed and how referrals occur. This is a great opportunity to discuss the District's vision and any support with prioritization that may be a part of that vision. Define and socialize with providers how these systems are engaged, when and through what processes.

- **Build crucial inroads with First Nations**

Fostering relationship with First Nations is a system priority and shouldn't be solely a worker-to-worker responsibility. Creating strong linkages, assigning a trauma-informed and culturally responsive relationship manager on the side of the TBDSSAB and outlining how resources are managed, accessed and by whom will be crucial to support the District's primarily Indigenous clients. Approaching this work from a position of relationship first is paramount.

- **Utilize data to direct partnership development**

As communities track data to understand the real time and evolving needs of their population, responding in a nimble and active way through partnership development and the launch of taskforces to respond to persistent issues is responsive and action-oriented. There are numerous sub-populations in Thunder Bay District that require some careful and formalized linkages and, at times, community mobilization. Continuing data tracking through these processes will allow the TBDSSAB to monitor impact.

- **Develop and launch a landlord engagement strategy**

A robust landlord engagement strategy would support move-ons from transitional, supportive and community housing and decrease the reliance on TBDSSAB resources to resolve most individuals' homelessness. This saves the community's most highly supported resources for those most in need. This approach opens up capacity on the part of providers and reduces duplication in an environment where each provider is completing multiple calls to individual landlords instead of having one space to access information. Providing consistent education and relationship management to the landlords also creates inroads in community narratives and discrimination.

Increase Capacity to Support Those with Complex Needs

Thunder Bay District has the benefit of having many incredibly committed community organizations take part of the work to end homelessness. There are mission-driven organizations and dedicated staff that care deeply about the individuals who are experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. Staff have strong values and a drive to move this work forward. Making available housing-focused tools, templates and resources for staff will increase consistency and professionalism in service for participants across providers. Opportunities for level-setting in terms of evidence-informed practices were seen across organization types. As the TBDSSAB is already engaged in a practice of anchoring conversations in the importance of data, and offering various training upon request, it is in a great position to expand these services in providing system-wide regular training and access to widely shared and implemented case management and support tools to standardize the client experience.

The TBDSSAB is positioned at a nexus of strong community relationships, trust in homelessness response and connection to various service delivery partners. This creates an incredible opportunity to support the community through consistent resourcing to level up the services provided. Organizations were open about their challenges with data collection and their pressing need for a shared trauma-informed data management and documentation system so individuals can be supported by not having to retell their story and to understand their historical challenges, triggers and previous supports. The District has the more advanced pieces of the puzzle in place—the culture, the values. This is a good time to go back to basics in terms of ensuring consistency in structure. This can be supported through the following opportunities:

- **Provide regular access to foundational best practices and case management training**

Increase opportunities during onboarding and ongoing training for a variety of foundational case management best practices such as trauma-informed care, documentation, privacy, housing-focused conversations, the SPDAT as a case management tool, cultural competence and care conferencing. This will ensure a strong base for all staff in the homelessness response sector and provide opportunities to practice important skills.

- **Extend training to community partners**

Ensuring that identified community partners also have access to training that occurs for front-line and leadership staff throughout the community is a great way to build bridges and also share the knowledge of how to best support those experiencing homelessness. This will increase trauma-informed approaches throughout the District and provide some common language for providers across sectors.

- **Institute the use of strong case management processes**

While training gives staff the skills to support individuals with complex needs, strong case management processes will give the process structure throughout the District. Sharing, socializing these tools and when possible, embedding them in funding agreements will increase capacity for staff and consistency for clients.

- **Operationalize data collection and integrate it into staff workflow**

The use of data collection protocols that integrate into staff workflow is key to a well-functioning system that collects consistent, practical and results-oriented data. These protocols exist to support staff, collaboration with other providers and the TBDSSAB in monitoring results and ensuring high-quality data. They reduce the risk of poor-quality data and create a base for data reliability. Staff coaching and resources are critical around consistency and buy-in, which can entail using data to structure and drive team meetings and service delivery.

Community Housing

The TBDSSAB's community housing buildings are a crucial and pivotal piece of the local homelessness and housing need response. Units are prioritized for those experiencing chronic homelessness and high depth of need. TBDSSAB staff support these units as part of their caseload. They are a realistic and often-used way for individuals to exit homelessness in the community. The District works hard to ensure the units are lower barrier in terms of access by allowing pets and accepting individuals with various complex and co-occurring needs.

With these significant efforts at accessibility in mind, OrgCode noted that there were opportunities to improve cleanliness, health and safety for tenants. Both staff and community partners voiced significant concerns for the well-being of tenants and staff. To address the sustainability of tenancies of individuals exiting homelessness in community housing, their quality of life and the perspective that the community currently has on community housing buildings, wrapping consistent supports around participants will be crucial. Part of this work is defining roles and responsibilities and support pathways for tenants.

TBDSSAB has a strong investment in the spirit of community housing—lower barrier services, strong prioritization for the most vulnerable and staff who are invested in ensuring people stay housed. What is needed now is a shift towards creating high-quality living for community housing tenants, rebalancing the ratios of tenants to staff based on need while ensuring consistent and systemic supports are in place. Integrating tenants more significantly into the community and neighbourhoods will also present opportunities for a larger change in how these spaces are discussed in the District. To realize this, the following opportunities are recommended:

- **Clarify the structure of support for tenants**

Ensuring that all tenants housed from the High Needs Homeless list are linked to long-term case management supports before being housed will set the most vulnerable tenants up for success and reduce crises in the building. Similarly, embedding eviction prevention in the support roles with clear, concrete and systemic processes will also allow for a strengths-focused and preventative focus to housing retention. Furthermore, it will be important to consider building saturation and ensure that if tenants with high and complex needs make up more than 15% of the building's tenants that 24/7 supports are provided on-site.

- **Align roles and responsibilities**

Creating clear delineations in roles and responsibilities for the staff (custodians, TOSW, and Tenant Supports) currently involved in community housing buildings will lessen burnout, ensure tenants are receiving professional services and create clarity for community partners, staff and tenants.

- **Increase and monitor housing satisfaction and social integration**

The research is clear that key protective factors for successful tenancies for tenants is feeling like they have a sense of home in terms of the aesthetics of their spaces and their housing satisfaction. Community housing should also be a space of stability and belonging. Investing in the increased capacity of Tenant Supports to create spaces for tenants to have ongoing and consistent chances to connect with others, contribute to

the community/ neighbourhood and engage in meaningful activities contributes to the strengths and successes of tenants and their tenancies. This would ensure that tenants build communities within and outside of their buildings, preparing them for potential move-ons. Growing a strong community housing culture within the building and strong community participation outside of it will develop crucial skills for people to engage with their community and reduce stigma throughout the District. Similarly, invest in the capacity of Custodians to keep places clean by avoiding scope creep in their roles, ensuring spaces are satisfactory in terms of cleanliness and upkeep and that the units feel like home to tenants. Institute feedback loops for community housing tenants to provide their perspectives on these measures and implement regular cycles of evaluation and change.

- **Share the story of community housing growth with the community**

The community survey brought to light a negative perspective on community housing buildings, particularly in the City of Thunder Bay. This impacted how tenants were viewed in the community, how the TBDSSAB's work was seen in the community and resulted in implications around future builds and community reception of these. Creating a roadmap to address the concerns in community housing buildings and consistently socializing successes and changes will allow for a new narrative to slowly build in how buildings are perceived.

Section 5: Recommendations and Opportunities for Action

The recommendations throughout this report are a result of insights gleaned from data analysis, investigation into alignment with evidence-informed practices and the crucial voices of community members, including people with lived and living experience, devoted services providers, and engaged community members throughout Thunder Bay District. They are identified to assist and guide the TBDSSAB in its work and its partnerships towards an intentionally housing-focused and high-functioning homelessness response. This is a response that is rooted in stronger housing outcomes for people experiencing or

at risk of chronic homelessness and unsheltered homelessness, improved pathways to and through support, and clarity amongst these pathways from providers and participants. The recommendations are organized as follows:

Ensure strong foundations for system responses to Homelessness

- Define and clarify community leadership processes for homelessness response
- Prioritize establishing data sharing models rooted in community values and priorities
- Strengthen responses that are Indigenous-designed and Indigenous-led by addressing system partnerships, types of units built and how policies are co-designed and implemented
- Align reporting structures with system goals
- Expand permanent housing and supports throughout the District

Invest in Community Engagement and Communication

- Develop and launch a proactive homelessness response communications strategy
- Optimize Community Liaison Committees for contested developments or ongoing services that are facing pushback

Prioritize concerted, assertive and housing-focused encampment response

- Develop Thunder Bay District Encampment Service Standards through the City of Thunder Bay's efforts to convene stakeholders
- Ensure response to encampments is housing-focused and solutions-oriented
- Evaluate shelter access and barriers
- Deepen encampment data collection

Standardize pathways through services

- Standardize and formalize homelessness prevention and shelter diversion
- Invest in strong data collection processes for homelessness inflow and prevention/diversion work

- Prioritize upstream prevention through community taskforces and targeted partnerships
- Review the alignment of resources and levels of need
- Focus the scope of TBDSSAB TOSW staff
- Complete system mapping in collaboration with partners

Align community resources towards community goals

- Identify and formalize community partnerships
- Build crucial inroads with First Nations
- Utilize data to direct partnership development
- Develop and launch a landlord engagement strategy

Increase Capacity to Support Those with Complex Needs

- Provide regular access to foundational best practices and case management training
- Extend training to community partners
- Institute the use of strong case management processes
- Operationalize data collection and integrate it into staff workflow

Invest in the sustainability and excellence of community housing

- Clarify the structure of support for tenants
- Align roles and responsibilities
- Increase and monitor housing satisfaction and social integration
- Share the story of community housing growth with the community