

There are better solutions to dealing with campsites than ripping up the homes of people who live on our streets.



FACT: Shelters are understaffed. Those employed often do not receive adequate training and support to assist people with complex needs.

FACT: Rules in shelters are strict, non-negotiable, and not always applied equally.

FACT: Shelter schedules lack flexibility for people with outside commitments and do not accommodate personal routines for rest or activity.

FACT: Shelters have little space for people to keep and protect personal belongings.

5. The only solution for informal settlements is to forcefully remove them.

FACT: Tearing down campsites has NOT reduced the number of those choosing to live outdoors but causes significant loss of personal belongings and further trauma.

FACT: Campers often return to cleared sites within days, sometimes hours.

Many communities have developed better, healthier

solutions than traditional shelters. Such solutions include security, sanitation facilities, electrical heat sources, personal care, and support from cultural and professional helpers on site.

People can enjoy the benefits of living in small communities of their choosing, with the dangers of camping significantly reduced.

Further reading:

<https://make-the-shift.org/resources/>
<https://allard.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-10/Rush%20to%20Judgment%20Report%20Oct%202023.pdf>

<https://mapsab.ca/community-based-research/complex-needs-banning-research-project/>

https://theyee.ca/Opinion/2024/01/19/Evictions-To-Nowhere-Must-Stop/?utm_source=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=190124

Conclusion

The answer to homelessness is housing for all – enough places that are safe, affordable, secure, and suitable.

The government’s failure to provide such housing is where the public’s energy needs to be directed. Until such housing is built, better short-term solutions are available:

- * Better, smaller and more varied shelter facilities than are presently available.
- * Stricter shelter standards for safety, sanitation, and staff training.
- * Camping alternatives like tiny homes, camp trailers and insulated tents in well-maintained and secure sites.

Current blinkered insistence on dismantling and eliminating informal settlements violates human rights and morality. It must end.

Support your neighbours who are homeless by contacting elected officials. Look for opportunities to volunteer and support people who are homeless. Stay informed and engaged by connecting with the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness.

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness

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Homelessness, Shelters and Camps



Myth and Reality

Debunking the Myths

Spreading myths about campsites and those who live in them is reprehensible and stands in the way of arriving at solutions which respect the dignity of those who live in the campsites and serve the best interests of the wider community.

People who want to destroy the homes of those living on our streets often try to create divisions in the larger community. Those who speak up for people who are homeless or who question the legality and morality of tearing down informal settlements are often labeled “bleeding hearts.”

FACT: We need to be concerned about people living outdoors.

FACT: No one chooses to be homeless.

FACT: Hundreds of Edmontonians live outdoors in conditions that are dangerous, unhealthy, and miserable. But for many, it’s a choice for survival.

Here are some myths used by those seeking to eradicate informal settlements.

1. Camps are dirty places full of garbage and needles.

FACT: Many people work hard to keep their shelters and surroundings tidy. When sanitary facilities are provided, camps are often in a clean condition. Without possibilities for waste disposal, hazardous waste can build up.

A Note on Terminology

Because the word “encampment” has been used by public officials and some media to stoke negative feelings among the public, we choose to call these makeshift living areas “informal settlements” or “campsites.”



Some people without housing use institutional shelters operated by funded organizations.

FACT: Lack of mental health supports and medical care for injuries and traumas cause increased substance use.

FACT: Lack of facilities for small businesses like bicycle repair or bottle picking may cause some campsites to look disorganized and messy.

SOLUTION: Providing needed sanitation facilities and work spaces, with social service supports, would be more cost effective and humane than displacing people when their areas are deemed messy.

2. People who live in informal settlements are lazy and/or criminal.

FACT: Physical and mental health challenges prevent some residents from holding steady jobs.

FACT: Low-paying and insecure jobs don’t provide enough money for rent/basic needs.

FACT: People choose to live outside with trusted relatives and friends.

FACT: People focused on survival are NOT hubs for criminal activity and possess little of interest to gangs.

FACT: Some items police have labeled as weapons in camps are commonly used tools – knives, axes, wrenches and screwdrivers.

FACT: Safety concerns as people try to stay warm could be addressed with safe heating.

SOLUTION: Providing housing and supports to maintain their community of family and friends is more cost effective than constantly employing police and clean-up crews to scatter people and destroy their belongings.

3. Emergency shelters have enough space for all who are homeless.

FACT: Shelters exist to provide temporary emergency accommodation. They are not a housing solution.

FACT: The number of shelter spaces over the years has usually been less than half the number of people who are homeless.

FACT: The province now only provides the total number of shelter spaces without saying where they are located. Its numbers are impossible to verify.

FACT: The number of available shelter spaces changes daily based on staff availability and weather conditions.

Providing detailed counts of those in need of shelter would help the public understand the need for governments to build supportive and affordable housing.

4. Shelters are a good option for people who do not have housing.

FACT: Not all shelters are open 24/7. Those who stay do not have control over outside commitments, rest, or activity. They may have to leave in the morning and return by a certain time to re-register.

FACT: Shelter users report feeling unsafe due to bullying, theft, harassment, and violence.

FACT: Shelters are crowded, offer minimal personal space (other than a sleeping mat), little privacy, quiet, or darkness for sleep.

FACT: Shelters that accept family groups and pets are uncommon, posing extra challenges.

FACT: Shelters have poor accommodation for many with diverse disabilities.

FACT: Those who use shelters report unsanitary, unhealthy, and crowded conditions, with limited access to washrooms and showers.

Continued on Other Side