FACTSHEET 1/8

Actions to Understand and Respect the Realities of People Living in Encampments

"There is too much racism and discrimination, and government officials do not understand the needs of people living in encampments who struggle day by day just to survive without a roof over their heads. Their encampments are dismantled or destroyed over and over again, which prevents trust from being built between city officials and people living in encampments". (Stakeholder)

A. Recognize that encampments are the result of numerous systemic failures.

B. Recognize that it is important to treat people living in encampments with dignity and to respect the spaces and homes they have made for themselves. In many communities, there are not enough shelter beds that are accessible and adapted to their specific needs. Most people living in encampments would prefer to have access to adequate housing, but they face many barriers due to the cost of housing, the lack of services adapted to their needs and the discrimination they face on a daily basis.

C. Recognize that there are significant power imbalances between encampment residents and the service providers, governments, and housed residents who have decision-making influence over most of the resources on which they depend to meet their basic needs. Decisions made about the enforcement of bylaws which may seem minor to those making the decision can have important consequences and make it more difficult for people living in encampments to access what they need to improve their situation.

- 👉 **Example:** Facilitate the work of independent organizations and advocates to support people living in encampments to actively participate in and influence decision-making processes. Community organizations and advocates can develop a strong bond of trust with people living in encampments and play an important role in ensuring their meaningful engagement and ensuring conditions for more effective collaboration. Ensure people living in encampments have access to legal representation, through legal aid or other means, to defend their human rights when needed, and explore opportunities for restorative justice when harms have occurred.

D. Recognize that people living in encampments are experts in their reality and are best placed to assess their needs. They are best placed to identify their needs for survival and priorities for improving their physical and mental health. They should be permitted to make decisions and take the necessary steps to protect themselves from the elements and not be at the mercy of bylaws written without input from people who have lived outdoors.

E. Recognize that the housing alternatives being offered may not be human rights compliant or meet the definition of adequate housing. People experiencing homelessness have shared with the Federal Housing Advocate their concerns about housing alternatives they were offered that had serious issues related to their health and safety (e.g., violence, discrimination, bug infestations) and institutional rules that infringed on their dignity and personal autonomy (e.g., curfews, restrictions on visitors and the ability to move about).

F. Recognize that current emergency shelters and transitional housing may pose greater risks for some people, specifically, women and people from the 2SLGBTQI+ community, who may face increased danger in shelters or transitional housing than they would living on the street or in an encampment. Emergency shelters and transitional housing also do not provide any security of tenure.

G. Recognize that First Nations, Inuit and Métis people may have a strong desire to avoid interactions with systems that have been historically oppressive and discriminatory (e.g., residential schools, child welfare system).

H. Recognize that restrictions on daytime camping and forced evictions create instability and insecurity for people living in encampments. These coercive measures create additional hardships for people experiencing homelessness and can have serious repercussions on their physical and mental health.

I. Recognize that some people living in encampments build a community that provides them with support; ensure that actions do not break relationships with this community, which includes peers, partners, companion animals and others. It is important to guard against uprooting people from their community and ensure the continuity of support and services that they need to prevent them from returning to the street.

J. Recognize that people living in encampments are resilient in the face of systemic neglect, and they must focus their daily energy on meeting their basic needs.

- 👉 **Example:** People living in encampments will not always be available or able to participate in activities according to the proposed schedule or programs made available to them. Take the time to adapt approaches to their daily reality, and ensure that the timing of interventions does not get in the way of their ability to fulfill their basic needs.

K. Recognize that people living in encampments also need rest during the day. There must be spaces made available specifically for them with basic services.

L. Recognize that people living in encampments will live in public space as long as no suitable alternatives are offered that provide decent, permanent and accessible housing. Municipal plans must strive to understand the reasons why these individuals are using public space and take steps to protect their fundamental human rights.

M. Recognize that people living in encampments choose places to settle where they can best meet their needs to have some privacy, to feel safe and to secure and store their personal belongings. Displacing people and policing where they can erect their tent can make it more difficult to stabilize their situation and improve their well-being.

N. Recognize that most people living in encampments are affected by trauma, and it is essential to ensure a trauma- and violence-informed[1] response.

O. Recognize that people living in encampments may avoid engagement out of fear that participation could expose them to racism, ableism, eviction or surveillance.

P. Recognize the importance of raising awareness, and inform the public about the reality of people living in encampments and the systemic issues that prevent their rights from being respected and fulfilled.

- 👉 **Example:** Encourage the public to contact a community organization offering social mediation services and established links to people living in encampments rather than the police if they need support in addressing a concern or conflict between housed and unhoused residents.

1. Trauma- and violence-informed approaches are policies and practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes and behaviours. These approaches increase safety, control and resilience for people who are seeking services in relation to experiences of violence or have a history of experiencing violence. For more info, see the Public Health Agency of Canada website.