

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
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To: Members of the Community and Public Services Committee

Re: Evaluation of Investment Options for Day Spaces

I am here speaking to you on behalf of ECOHH, also known as the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness. ECOHH is a member-driven coalition that advocates for actions and solutions to housing and homelessness issues.

I am here today to affirm that permanent day spaces for people experiencing homelessness are vitally important because, to put it bluntly, homelessness kills and access to space during the daytime is a matter of life and death for unhoused people in our community.

This past Thursday, hundreds of Edmontonians gathered at the Homeless Memorial on 104 ave to honor and remember the 349 individuals who died in 2025 due to homelessness. This brings the total to 2,566 individuals since ECOHH began counting in 2005. While the names of people are not released, we know that the individuals on this list were someone's son, daughter, mother, father, friend and neighbour, they were loved, will be missed and their deaths were entirely preventable.

In the long run we need more permanent housing; in the interim we need **dignified places** for people to stay alive, and this includes day spaces. ECOHH firmly believes that permanent, year-round day spaces for people experiencing homelessness **will save lives** and that Edmonton City Council should develop a motion for investment in a Community Service Hub option. ECOHH members identified five reasons why the Community Service Hub option is the right decision.

1. **Addressing social service fragmentation:** Many of our essential social and health services are offered at different locations across the city. Some of these services are proximate to each other downtown; nonetheless, people are forced to leave one site where they are obtaining care in order to access services at another site. This fragmentation is a barrier that impedes pathways out of homelessness. By centralizing services and support in one location, the community hub model increases engagement and access to essential services and systems of care.
2. **Reducing risks to health and wellbeing:** Disconnected and fragmented services puts people at greater risk. The Day Space Evaluation included in this meeting package

reported that 35% of the people who accessed day centres between December and March were sleeping outdoors. Many of these individuals are on the waitlist for supportive housing, and this wait time is on average **513 days**.

These community members are at extremely high risk for frostbite injuries and hypothermia. Between April 1, 2024 and March 30, 2025, **1,307** diagnoses of frostbite were recorded by Alberta Health Services in the Edmonton Zone; of which **53%** were unhoused Albertans. A recent analysis of frostbite data revealed that a significant proportion of frostbite injuries (35%) occurred at temperatures warmer than -20 degrees celsius.

The risks and harms associated with the lack of safe, adequate shelter are on full display in our emergency rooms and hospital systems. ECOHH recently acquired data on emergency room visits in Edmonton. In 2025, there were nearly 12,000 visits by individuals with no fixed address to Royal Alexandra Hospital's emergency room; this was roughly 15% of all emergency room visits at that hospital. People experiencing homelessness seek care at emergency rooms because they have no access to primary care. Many are seeking treatment for injuries and illness attributed to their lack of permanent housing.

3. **Resolving homelessness:** The Day Space Evaluation included in this meeting package reported that respondents surveyed valued the day space as a “one-stop shop” where they could access basic needs and resources. This gives us a glimpse into the importance of day spaces and the merits of the Community Service Hub Model. By co-locating multidisciplinary, integrated support, day spaces function as critical access points into the broader homeless system of care and support. The Day Space Evaluation clearly shows that these enhanced day spaces resulted in an increase in service utilization. Of particular note was the increase at iHuman which saw a 321 per cent increase from December to March. This trend stands out for attention because youth homelessness is one of the biggest risk factors for homelessness across the lifecourse.
4. **Promoting inclusion, community and recovery:** One of ECOHH's core principles is that home is more than four walls and a roof – it is housing, supports, and community. A distinguishing feature of the Community Service Hub model is that it provides an intentional space for relationship-building and social connection. These are both vitally important to the health and wellbeing of community members. Additionally, these spaces provide opportunity for meaningful daily activity, which is itself a key component in personal recovery.
5. **Upholding human rights:** The common thread connecting the previous four points is the principle of dignity: people experiencing homelessness have inherent worth and value as human beings. Recognizing and respecting this dignity means upholding their human right to basic amenities like water, food, and washrooms; essential social and health services, and adequate housing. Of all the models under consideration, the

Community Service Hub model is the model that best upholds human rights by protecting and respecting human dignity.

ECOHH urges this committee to recommend to City council that Option 4 - the Community Service Hub model - be implemented in Edmonton. It will save lives, it will increase access to broader systems of care, and it will fulfill basic rights that are fundamental to human dignity and wellbeing.

NOTES FROM REPORTS

- Establishing on-going, long-term support for a Community Service Hub is aligned with City of Edmonton plans and policies. According to these plans and policies, the City has a role in the prevention of homelessness, the resolution of homelessness, and the prioritization of safety and wellbeing in emergency responses to homelessness. A Community Service Hub contributes to all three of these goals. Additionally, the City of Edmonton's Extreme Weather Response policy (Policy C620) stresses that day spaces are a key component of the broader network of community-based services that support safety and stabilization.
- "Administration scanned funding streams across orders of government and community grants to confirm that, at this time, **there is no ongoing operating funding available for day space sites.**"
- From the CS03259 report:
 - "Day spaces are complementary to shelters, outreach and the Navigation and Support Centre. They are daytime spaces for respite, for people to engage with one another and, when possible, connect to services. They do not replace other crisis services but provide additional dedicated space for housing workers and other professionals to maintain continuity with clients to pursue efforts towards stability."
 - Individuals who used day spaces shared that sites provide a unique setting not available elsewhere in the crisis services continuum:
 - a place to gather with friends and family not living or sleeping at the same location;
 - an inclusive environment that facilitated rapport with staff;
 - recreational activities offered alongside therapeutic supports; and
 - the ability to set goals and access services at their own pace."
 - "While day spaces may provide respite, they cannot substantially prevent continued health decline unless complemented by intensive, integrated case management services."
- From Attachment 1:
 - "Day spaces are low-barrier sites that prioritize inclusivity, accessibility and fostering community, while acting as **a critical access point into the broader homeless system of care.** They operate on a spectrum of services that range from temporary warming stations to permanent and comprehensively resourced community centres with onsite supports and access to multidisciplinary services."
- From Attachment 2:
 - **"an increase in service utilization following the introduction of City funding"**
 - **"increase at iHuman was particularly significant"** (321 per cent increase from December to March). This trend suggests a specific need for expanded daytime youth services in Edmonton." **YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS A SIGNIFICANT RISK FACTOR FOR CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS**
 - **35% were sleeping outdoors**
- From Attachment 3:

- “Onsite staff are equipped to deliver basic first aid and overdose response, mitigating the most acute risks of homelessness. While the primary focus is on survival, day space establishes the necessary trust and safety required for future engagement with the broader homeless-serving system of care.”
- “Specialized services can be added to augment the day space model from a reactive crisis response toward a proactive stabilization framework. These expanded support – including housing, health care (i.e. wound care, primary care), mental health, income, cultural and recreational programming– are designed to facilitate long-term housing retention and holistic wellbeing.”
 - Critique of Winter Response Model:
 - “While this model provides a critical safety net for those most at risk during winter, it is undermined by short-term, reactive funding cycles. These funding cycles require agencies to rapidly recruit and hire staff without the prospect of job security, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff . These compressed timelines make it difficult to ensure that staff are adequately trained to do challenging work. Moreover, the inherent instability of their funding prevents them from contributing to a client’s long-term housing or health stability. The dynamic is even more challenging when there is a foundational lack of permanently funded, year-round day spaces to enhance for the winter. When asked about winter funding, one respondent replied: “when there’s nothing to ramp up, don’t even bother.”
 - Critique of Essential Year-Round:
 - “However, the absence of integrated clinical resources for physical health, mental health, and substance use remains a critical gap. Without onsite multidisciplinary support, the model’s capacity to stabilize those with the most acute or complex needs is constrained.”

ABOUT ECOHH

The Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) was created in 1986. While the majority of the members are local non-governmental associations, both individuals and the private sector are represented in its membership. Representatives from the municipal government also participate at the ECOHH table.

OUR VISION

To have dignified, accessible, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and safe housing, in healthy communities, empowers all people in Edmonton.

OUR MISSION

The Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness is a member-driven coalition working to raise awareness, advocate, and educate for actions and solutions to housing and homelessness issues.

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Housing is a human right.
- Home is more than four walls and a roof—it is housing, supports, and community.
- Collaboration: Diverse individuals and groups share responsibility, in relationships, to effectively address housing and homelessness.
- Participating together: All voices, especially those most negatively impacted and marginalized, are heard and incorporated when making decisions.
- Commitment to evidence; openness to creative thinking; transparent and accountable processes

OUR PRIORITIES/GOALS

- Increase awareness and knowledge of current and emerging housing and homelessness issues, information about successful responses, and the need to create options based upon new approaches and thinking.
- Support and collaborate with actionable local projects geared to addressing housing and homelessness.
- Identify and advocate for public policies to achieve ECOHH's vision.
- Create opportunities for collaboration amongst members and with external partners to respond to housing needs.