Centre Hope

Youth Agency Collaboration Final Report 2020

A community approach to systems change for improving services for Edmonton's vulnerable youth

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Look for these symbols for more insight.

Youth Interviews and Feedback

General Research

Centre Hope Research

YACC Engagement

See Appendices

Youth Agency Collaboration Initiative

The Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) is driven by five youth serving agencies in Edmonton, which provide services to vulnerable youth.

Boyle Street Community Services

A part of Boyle Streets Community Services philosophy is to deliver holistic support for youth recovery in a safe, respectful environment, where youth and families are included and valued. The positive identities of youth and families are supported by recognizing their skills, strengths, successes, and resources. The families are supported to improve family dynamics, function, communication, wellness, and stability. From the beginning of their time in the program until transition, youth and families are supported by staff who strive to enhance previously existing community supports and to create new connections that offer long-term community-based alternatives.

Edmonton John Howard Society

Edmonton John Howard Society provide services ranging from housing supports to individual guidance. We meet youth where they are at and work alongside them as they develop a plan for positive change.

iHuman Youth Society

The authentic culture at iHuman Youth Society is one of acceptance, openness and a genuine willingness to support youth. The focus is to offer youth opportunities to meet with iHuman professional staff and other social agency personnel as required, to engage in harm reduction activities, and participate in arts-related activities that foster positive self-worth and encourage reintegration into the community.

Old Strathcona Youth Society

The Old Strathcona Youth Co-op was established in 1998. We are dedicated in being a non-judgmental, flexible, street level resource concerned with protecting the safety, self-worth and dignity of youth. Old Strathcona Youth Society has become a focal point for youth to access information and resources to meet their needs.

Youth Empowerment and Support Services

Based in Edmonton, YESS provides immediate and low-barrier shelter, temporary housing, and individualized wraparound support for youth aged 15 to 24.

We focus on working collaboratively with our youth-supporting partners on prevention and diversion out of homelessness. And ultimately, we aim to walk beside traumatized youth as they heal through relationships.

Executive Summary

The Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) project began as a desire among five major youth serving non-profit agencies in Edmonton to find better ways of working together to better help vulnerable youth. With their commitment to improve collaboration with financial support provided by the City of Edmonton, the project was officially launched in 2019. Centre Hope came on board to guide the project, providing engagement and research support for the five youth serving agencies comprising the Youth Agency Collaboration Committee (YACC). The YAC project is an exploratory research initiative aimed at improving the delivery of youth services among the five participating agencies. It's also about understanding the larger system within which these five agencies work to better the lives of Edmonton's vulnerable youth.

Understanding how the youth services system works as separate and distinct from the adult services system to meet the needs of vulnerable youth is an ambitious and essential task. It is necessary for finding ways to improve the delivery of services aimed at vulnerable youth. As part of the YAC project, efforts were made to capture a snapshot of the youth services system through the experiences of the five participating agencies and the experiences of the vulnerable youth using their services. Using collaborative engagement techniques focused on client journey mapping as well as interviews with vulnerable youth, a picture began to emerge illustrating the journey that some vulnerable youth in Edmonton are making to seek help from agencies. While that picture provides insight into what is working well in the current youth services system, it also highlights gaps. Complementing this work, research was conducted to better understand efforts and recommended solutions to address gaps in the delivery of youth services, with a focus on local and national efforts as well as relevant international ones.

A snapshot of gaps in the current youth services system is presented in this report. It reveals a reality all too common in the field of social services. The findings show that despite the good intentions of vulnerable youth serving agencies, they face many systems-level challenges that create obstacles for achieving positive outcomes for vulnerable youth. Indeed, despite their good intentions, the efforts of individual agencies often result in the provision of services that are uncoordinated, inconsistent, and fragmented. This result culminates in creating barriers for vulnerable youth to access the services they need. Many vulnerable youth today need more help than ever given the growing complexities in the issues they are facing be they vulnerable Indigenous youth in Edmonton or vulnerable youth facing LGBTQ2S issues, for example. Providing adequate support to help vulnerable youth facing these growing complexities becomes even more challenging for agencies. Ultimately, something needs to change. A different approach founded on systems-level collaboration among agencies, governments and communities is needed to provide better coordinated services so that collectively, everyone can work towards improving the social and health well-being of vulnerable youth.

Research Overview

The following five sources of data were used to produce this report:

- Stakeholder engagement with YACC agencies
- Interviews with vulnerable youth
- Environmental scan on the state of vulnerable youth issues
- Literature review on best-practices for making collaborative systems-level change in youth services
- HelpSeeker data (inventory of data identifying youth services available in Edmonton)

The appendices in the report contain details related to some of these sources of data: the stakeholder engagement reports summarizing feedback from YACC agencies and vulnerable youth, as well as the full detailed literature review conducted for the YAC project.

Main Youth Service Challenges

Analysis of the data resulted in highlighting four main service challenges in the delivery of services aimed at vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #1
Uncoordinated Access and Infrastructure

Uncoordinated and inconsistent access to services for vulnerable youth along with uncoordinated infrastructure in the form of cross-agency administrative processes such as intake, evaluation, data sharing of client information, and training, resulting in impacts on accessibility to services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #2
Uncoordinated Youth Care Practices

Uncoordinated and inconsistent youth care practices across service providers resulting in an inadequate focus on prevention and healing including trauma support and harm reduction, thereby impacting accessibility of services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #3
Funding

Inadequate and inconsistent funding of vulnerable youth serving agencies, resulting in the creation of competition among agencies, which ends up pitting them against one another for limited dollars.

Service Challenge #4
Collaboration and Communication

Ineffective and inefficient collaboration and communication among vulnerable youth serving agencies driven largely by competition for funding but also by a lack of trust among agencies.

These four service challenges were further examined to determine the underlying needs or actions required to address them. Analysis focused on determining if any of the service challenges could be identified as priorities to address because of their critical role in facilitating the change needed to create a collaborative youth services model. Two service challenges emerged as strategic levers of change: 1) addressing uncoordinated access and infrastructure and 2) uncoordinated youth care practices.

This report presents seven recommendations as strategic steps to address the service challenges. These recommendations were further corroborated through comparative analysis of recommendations made in similar local and national reports focused on collaboration and systems change in social services. Together, the seven recommendations in this report provide strategic direction for achieving systems-level changes through the creation of a collaborative vulnerable youth services model.

Strategic Direction for Collaborative Youth Services Model

Based on the information gathered at this stage in the YAC project, the following statements provide strategic direction to implement a collaborative youth services model as a way to improve services for vulnerable youth:

Implementing coordinated infrastructure for efficient data collection and sharing among vulnerable youth serving agencies will play a key role in enabling effective collaboration to facilitate coordinated access and infrastructure. It will also facilitate coordinated care for a collaborative youth service model aimed at increasing consistent and timely access to services and increasing positive outcomes for vulnerable youth. Technology will support this coordination of data sharing. Engaging vulnerable youth will also play a key role in the creation of a collaborative model to ensure the diverse needs of vulnerable youth are adequately addressed. Developing a funding strategy based on collaborative use of resources will help enable adequate and sustainable funding to implement a collaborative youth services model. Moving in this strategic direction will help facilitate impactful systems-level change that results in better provision of services, achievement of collective goals, and sustainable use of resources.

Closing Remarks

The report's proposed collaborative youth services model was developed for the purposes of the YAC project and for implementation among the five participating agencies. While this model is based on feedback from these agencies and the vulnerable youth they serve, it reflects principles emerging in work being done locally, nationally and internationally to develop collaborative service delivery models. The collaborative model presented in this report thus represents a model, which in theory, could be applied beyond the YAC project and apply to the rest of youth services system in Edmonton as way to make transformative lasting change resulting in positive outcomes for vulnerable youth through better service delivery.

As facilitators of the YAC project, Centre Hope wishes to acknowledge the good work of the five participating agencies. We commend them for initiating the YAC project. We commend their courage and willingness to overcome challenges to pursue possibilities for collective change to better address the needs of Edmonton's vulnerable youth.

Eli Schrader

Structure of Report

This report examines different sources of data, which together help create a snapshot of the youth services system in Edmonton as it relates to vulnerable youth. The report moves from high-level concepts and information on issues related to youth services to more specific attention on challenges facing vulnerable youth serving providers and vulnerable youth as users of services. It finally ends with solutions to help address the challenges, culminating with a proposed collaborative youth services model. This report contains the following sections:

Introduction to Youth Agency Collaboration

This section briefly describes the YAC project including the five vulnerable youth serving agencies in Edmonton participating in it and the project's goals.

Systems Change for Complex Social Issues

This section introduces key concepts in systems thinking. The components of systems are explained. Systems change is also explained and why it is needed to help solve complex social problems.

Research

This section explains research methods and presents an overview of different types of data gathered and analyzed to write this report. It also explores the results of the environmental scan, highlighting key facts about the context in which services for vulnerable youth are currently being provided. Both national and local data are discussed. Key context factors are described including youth demographics, youth homelessness, youth services trends in Edmonton, and economic, political and legal factors related to services for vulnerable youth.

Overview of Agencies in the Youth Agency Collaboration

This section presents a table summarizing common findings from recent reports shared by agencies participating in the YAC project. Findings include vulnerable youth demographics, top issues facing vulnerable youth, trends, funding, gaps and barriers, and evaluation practices.

What's Working Well in Youth Services

This section presents feedback gathered through engagement sessions on what is currently working well in the youth services system in Edmonton to meet the needs of vulnerable youth. Three top themes are presented. Comments from vulnerable youth and agencies involved in the YAC project are summarized.

Goals of the Youth Services System

This section briefly presents the goals of the youth services system as identified by vulnerable youth serving agencies during engagement sessions for the YAC project. A total of 12 goals emerged, including system, agency and vulnerable youth goals.

Service Challenges

Four main service challenges related to the provision of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth are summarized in this section. Each main service challenge is further explained and supported with evidence including feedback from YACC agencies and vulnerable youth who are using or have used services.

A Snapshot of the Youth Services System in Edmonton

This section combines the four main service challenges to paint a picture of how the current system is working to provide services to vulnerable youth. It summarizes key findings and highlights gaps at a systems level. An infographic illustrating the combined effect of the four main service challenges is introduced. It draws attention to the need for systems change.

Implications for Addressing Challenges

In this section, each of the four main service challenges is broken down to determine what actions need to be taken to address them. Each main service challenge is addressed separately and supported with needs statements in the form of bullet points for easy comprehension. The statements were developed using data gathered for this report including engagement feedback and research.

Primary Challenge of Youth Services System

This section briefly introduces the idea of strategic levers to facilitate systems change. Out of the four main service challenges, two are presented as being strategic in terms of focusing energy to begin to make impactful change in the delivery of services to vulnerable youth in Edmonton.

Recommendations

This section outlines seven recommendations to achieve systems change through the creation of a collaborative youth services model. The recommendations address the four main service challenges with special attention paid to the service challenges that are strategic levers for change.

Strategic Direction for Collaborative Youth Services Model

This section presents a roadmap outlining strategic direction for implementing a collaborative youth services model. It is based on the recommendations. The roadmap consists of written statements that focus on strategic priorities and explain how and why change will take place to address gaps in the delivery of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth.

Next Steps

This section explains the next steps for the YAC project including the launch of a pilot for a collaborative youth services model. It presents a table outlining short-, mid- and long-term tasks required for implementing the recommendations according to the strategic direction presented in this report.

"Systems thinking reminds us that all system parts are either directly or indirectly connected to each other and the outcomes of systems are the product of these interactions."

Foster-Fishman et al., *Putting the system back into systems change.*

Systems Change for Complex Social Issues

Big challenges require big change in order to make a difference. This, in a nutshell, is a simplified way of understanding what is at the heart of systems change. Addressing the complex social issues facing today's vulnerable youth, for example, is a big challenge that requires change at a systems level. There is growing interest in this type of change among governments and organizations dedicated to the provision of social services. They hope that systems change will result in improving outcomes for people. So, what does it mean when we say "systems change"? Who is "the system"? There is an entire field dedicated to systems change and systems thinking. This section outlines some key concepts, which will help understand the findings and recommendations in this report.

A system is made of separate different moving parts or different members who have roles and who interact and have interdependencies. Together, the members function as a whole and make up "the system" as they adhere to both informal and formal rules that guide their behaviours. In the provision of social services, system members can include everyone from funders, governments, non-profit and private sector agencies and their staff, the people seeking services, and other organizations that indirectly enable the provision of services.

A system develops an organized structure of sorts, resulting from several things including policies, routines or practices, resources, regulations, infrastructure, power dynamics, and relationships. It functions in dynamic ways that may not be apparent at first glance but which really reflect the result of a web of different interactions and rules. A system can have intentional positive consequences, such as improving social and health well-being outcomes for vulnerable youth. However, a system can operate in ways that despite its good intentions, results in unintended negative consequences. That's when help is needed.

Systems change is about making structural change that addresses challenges and prevents negative consequences. It's about making transformative change that lasts. Systems change does this by striving for large-scale change that fixes root causes of complex system problems. Finding strategic levers that facilitate systems change is critical for success in making impactful change.

Introduction to Youth Agency Collaboration

The Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) is an exploratory research project that was initiated in 2019. It is guided by a group of agencies in Edmonton that is focused on helping vulnerable youth and focused on improving the delivery of services amongst themselves. It is comprised of executives working in five non-profit agencies who are committed to improving the social and health well-being outcomes of Edmonton vulnerable youth. The members of the project along with the project goals are listed below.

Youth Agency Collaboration Committee (YACC) Members

- Boyle Street Community Services
- Edmonton John Howard Society
- iHuman Youth Society
- Old Strathcona Youth Society
- Youth Empowerment and Support Services

Youth Agency Collaboration Goals

- Understand and map current vulnerable youth support services and programs among Youth Agency Collaboration Committee members.
- Identify perceived service delivery gaps, redundancies and inefficiencies among Youth Agency Collaboration Committee (YACC) members.
- Establish a clear understanding or a best-practice collaborative model among Youth Agency Collaboration Committee (YACC) members.
- Develop a plan for future implementation to ensure a best-practice coordinated service-delivery model.

A Note on Sources Used

The table on page 13 identifies the use of various sources to produce this report. The following definitions apply:

Primary sources:

Original materials or evidence created with first-hand information or knowledge; for example, survey or census research, interviews, corporate or organizational records, and works of art.

Secondary sources:

Sources that rely on primary sources to be analyzed, evaluated and synthesized in order to produce a second-hand account; for example, scholarly journal articles, textbooks, government documents, books, and reports.

Scholarly literature:

Articles written by researchers who are experts with educational credentials. The articles are submitted to peer-reviewed publications such as academic journals and are aimed at academics, researchers and scholars.

Grey literature:

Refers to information that is published outside of formal peer-reviewed publications including work produced by governments, corporations, organizations, academics and research institutes such as policy briefs, reports, and white papers. The information is aimed at a broader audience than academics ranging from practitioners, experts, and researchers to the general public.

Research

Research was conducted to begin to understand the youth services system in Edmonton as it relates to vulnerable youth, to identify service delivery gaps, and to develop a collaborative solution. Multiple methods were used to understand the nature of the challenges in delivering services to vulnerable youth.

Five main different sources of data were used to help capture a snapshot of the current delivery of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth. They are summarized in a table on the next page. Priority was given to local knowledge and expertise, and lived experience of people working in youth services and vulnerable youth using the services. Research based on relevant experiences in Edmonton, Alberta and Canada was also prioritized and complemented with international information when appropriate. The five sources of data are:

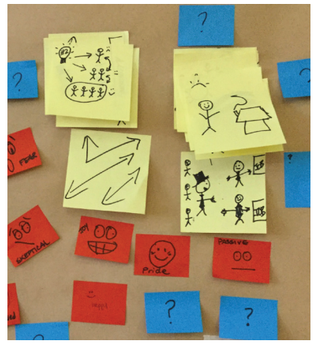
- Stakeholder engagement with YACC agencies
- Interviews with vulnerable youth
- Environmental scan on the state of vulnerable youth issues
- Literature review
- HelpSeeker data (inventory of data identifying youth services available in Edmonton)

Research Highlights

Innovative methods for gathering and analyzing data were used to produce the findings in this report:

Collaborative visual-based engagement with YACC agency staff resulting in the creation of maps illustrating a fictitious vulnerable youth's journey in the current youth services system.

Purpose: to engage stakeholders in systems thinking, to reveal their privately held mental models of how the current system works, and to inspire solutions-based thinking.



Youth Agency Collaboration Data Sources

Method	Primary or Secondary	Who/What	Collection Time Period	Qualitative or Quantitative Data
Stakeholder Engagement Sessions with YACC Agencies	Primary	Agency leaders at five vulnerable youth serving agencies in Edmonton • Boyle Street Community Services • Edmonton John Howard Society • iHuman Youth Society • Old Strathcona Youth Society • Youth Empowerment and Support Services	April to December 2019	Qualitative & Quantitative written comments, captured dialogue, and system map drawings
Interviews with Vulnerable Youth Questionnaire	Primary	Youth aged 18 and older who are using services or have used services at participating agencies in YAC project.	October to December 2019	Qualitative & Quantitative audio interviews recording opinions of vulnerable youth related use of services
Environmental Scan	Primary & Secondary	Municipal census data, grey and scholarly literature, Statistics Canada data	October to December 2019	Qualitative & Quantitative demographic data, government & organization reports, and research with focus on vulnerable youth services, non-profits, collaborative service models
Literature Review	Secondary	15 grey and scholarly literature between 2014 and 2019 from local, national and international agencies on best practices for system level changes to service delivery in the human services field	September to October 2019	Qualitative research and reports on vulnerable youth services, collaboration; includes lessons learned, outcomes, evidence
HelpSeeker Data	Secondary	Data capturing an inventory of community programs offered to vulnerable youth in Edmonton through collaborative efforts of HelpSeeker and the Neighbourhood Empowerment Teams (NET)	April 2019	Qualitative & Quantitative categorized vulnerable youth programs available in Edmonton based on organization type, program type, and location

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was conducted to better understand the context in which agencies in Edmonton operate to provide services to vulnerable youth. Key findings are presented on the following pages.

While Canada's youth are more connected, diverse and educated and socially engaged than youth in the past, not all youth are sharing in these benefits. National and local data supporting this finding will be explored. Other key factors such as the political context will be examined in relation to the provision of services to vulnerable youth.

Youth Demographics

National Data

There are seven million youth in Canada aged 15 to 30. They represent 19 per cent of our country's total population, according to Statistics Canada. Western Canada and the North have the highest proportion of youth populations. Indigenous youth including First Nations, Métis and Inuit are the fastest growing youth populations, far outpacing increases in non-Indigenous youth populations. That being said, ethnic diversity among youth is increasing. In terms of gender identity trends among Canadian youth, between five and eight per cent of Canadian youth aged 15 to 30 identified as either homosexual or bisexual. Within this sample, youth over 18 identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual reported the highest levels of experiencing discrimination followed next by youth with disabilities, visible minority youth and female youth.[1]

While more youth in Canada are educated than ever, youth from lower income families face challenges. There remains a large gap in educational attainment between lower and higher income families across the country.

[1] Statistics Canada, A Portrait of Canadian Youth.

Local Data

So how do youth in Edmonton compare to these national trends? Youth aged 15 to 24 make up 10 per cent of the city's total population, according to the 2019 Census data. In Alberta, Edmonton has by far the highest Indigenous population in the province. This reality is reflected in youth populations. Out of youth aged 15 to 24 in Alberta, 18 per cent are either First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit) compared to 12 per cent of youth of non-Indigenous identity.[2]

Edmonton's 2019 Census data sheds light on youth identifying as LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and 2-Spirit). While the sample of youth is small (N=482), it represents benchmark data. The data shows out of youth aged 15 to 24 who self-identified using categories either than man/boy and woman/girl and prefer not to answer, most youth identified as non-binary (44%), followed by transman (28%). These were the two dominant categories followed by transwoman (12%), another gender (8.5%) and two-spirit (7.8%).[3]

In yet another survey on transyouth across Alberta, it shows safety, violence, and discrimination are major issues facing this youth population. LGBTQ2S youth in Edmonton face yet another challenge: there are limited services available to help them and this increases their vulnerability, according to a recent report.[4]

[2] Statistics Canada, Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census.

[3] City of Edmonton, 2019 Census. Age Range and Gender Report (Ward).

[4] Rainbow Alliance, LGBTQ2S+ Survey Report, p. 5.

Some Trends in Youth Homelessness

- Youth under 16 who leave home tend to the experience more episodes of homelessness, more bullying, and are more likely to be victims of crime including sexual assault, be involved with children's services, have greater mental health and addictions, and attempt suicide.
- Indigenous youth were most likely (70%) to report involvement with Children's Services compared to non-Indigenous youth.
- Transgender and LGBTQ2S youth are more likely to leave home at an early age and report family conflict and abuse as leading to homelessness.
- 78% of youth report conflict with parents as main reason for leaving home.
- Homeless youth tend to drop out of school and face learning challenges and bullying.

Gaetz et al., *Without a home: The national youth homelessness survey.*

Youth Homelessness

National Data

According to a recent national report, an estimated 35,000 to 40,000 Canadian youth aged 13 to 24 experience homeless in Canada in a year. These youth make up about 20 per cent of the total homeless population across the country. The majority of the youth (58%) reported being male; 31 per cent were Indigenous youth; 30 per cent identified as LGBTQ2S; and 28 per cent identified as racialized community members.[5]

Local Data

Efforts were made to obtain an accurate local count of youth homelessness by working closely with YACC agencies. However, an accurate number of homeless youth in Edmonton could not be confirmed in 2019.

Data gathered on sexual orientation and gender identity for Edmonton and Alberta shows that there are three main top reasons lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth are homeless or at risk of it: 1) they ran away because of family rejection, 2) they were forced out by parents, and 3) they were physically, emotionally or sexually abused.[6]

Economic Factors

Alberta continues to face a challenging economic landscape following years of struggle in the oil and gas sector. In general, unemployment rates in the province have been higher than the national average between 2016 and 2019. The data on youth unemployment in 2019 paint an even more dire picture. While Albertan youth aged 15 to 24 across all educational levels faced higher unemployment than youth across Canada, Albertan youth with less education fared much worse. This is especially true for male youth with less education.

The unemployment rate for males aged 15 to 24 with some high school in 2019 was 26.1% compared to the national average of 18.6 per cent for males in the same age category with some high school. In fact, when compared among both sexes and across all educational attainment categories made available in 2019, Albertan males aged 15 to 24 had the highest unemployment rate. Similarly, Albertan females aged 15 to 24 with some high school followed in second place with an unemployment rate of 20.9 per cent in 2019 compared to the national average of 15.8 per cent unemployment for females with some high school in the same age category.[7]

[5] Gaetz et al., Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey, p. 6.

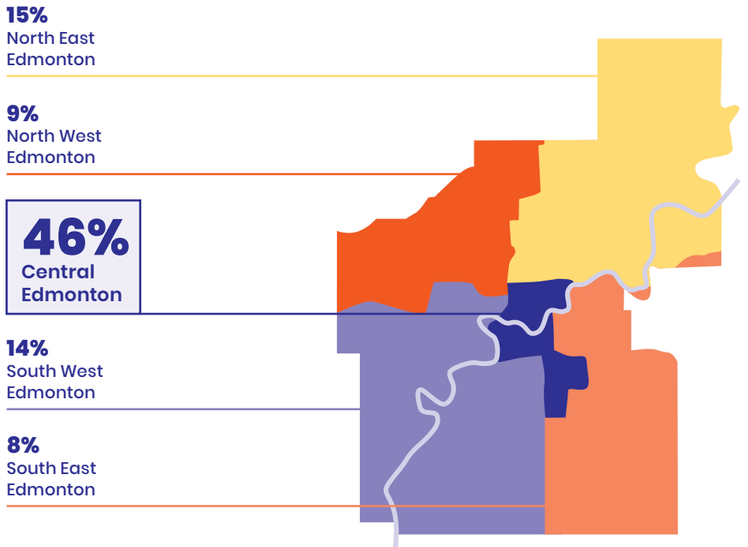
[6] Edmonton Community Foundation, Vital Topic: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

[7] All information in paragraph from Statistics Canada, Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment.

Youth Services Available in Edmonton

Edmonton provides many services to help youth. Within the city's limits, there are 823 programs offered to youth in 265 locations with most located in central Edmonton, according to a system-mapping tool called HelpSeeker. The tool captures data about community resources. However, the data does not represent services or programs offered specifically to Edmonton's vulnerable youth such as homeless youth. Instead it represents services or programs related to youth in general. The highest concentration of programs is located in central Edmonton (46%) followed next by programs located in North East Edmonton (15%), South West (14%), North West (9%), and South East (8%).

Program Concentration in Edmonton



Technological Factors

National Data

Trends have emerged related to the behaviour of youth as well as the behaviour of non-profit agencies in their uses of technology. Canadian youth are the most connected population in the country. Nearly 100 per cent of youth across the country between the ages of 15 and 30 use the Internet daily or own a smartphone. This is true across all provinces and all household income groups. Furthermore, 93 per cent of youth in this age group report using social networking sites.[8] Local data also shed light on the technology behaviours of LGBTQ2S youth, one of the youth populations accessing youth services in Edmonton. Close to half of LGBTQ2S youth surveyed reported accessing online support on social networking sites like Facebook, Reddit and other forums. However, many vulnerable youth who reach out to services for help may not have the same access to technology as currently reflected in these statistics.[9]

Use of technology among non-profit agencies emerges as a trend in research with a common main theme: agencies face challenges keeping pace with changes in technology and managing their data. In a recent special senate committee report on the charitable sector in Canada, non-profit agencies reported technological capacity as a top concern related to the ability to meet increasing demands for services. Agencies told the committee that technological improvements are needed to enable agencies to move towards a model of shared services including shared technologies. As a result, the following recommendation is included in the senate committee report: "That the Government of Canada establish a funding stream for projects to incent organizations to develop shared technologies to manage their administrative requirements."[10]

[8] Statistics Canada, A Portrait of Canadian Youth.

[9] Rainbow Alliance, LGBTQ2S+ Survey Report, p. 15.

[10] Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, Catalyst for change, p. 17

Local Data

Alberta-based research shows that non-profit agencies in the provinces are not fully leveraging the potential of technology to manage their data in standardized and deliberate ways across all areas of work related to service delivery. Albertan agencies surveyed in 2018 said they value data, but managing data is a challenge. Agencies reported that they see data as being useful for several reasons. They include better knowledge about clients, better service provision, and collaboration with other agencies. Their top challenges related to data management are staff training, inconsistent data, unlinked data (meaning the data are not useful), incomplete data and hard-to-use databases.[11]

[11] Zhang & Barbosa, SAGE Not-For-Profit Data Capacity & Needs Assessment Survey, p. 5, 7.

Youth Attitudes on Sharing Personal Information with Agencies

Overall, 75% of vulnerable youth interviewed reported that they did not have concerns about sharing their personal information.

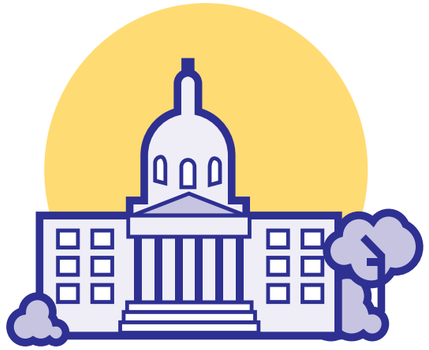
Despite this, data show that Indigenous youth tend to report more negative experiences than non-Indigenous youth when it comes to sharing information.

See the youth engagement report in the appendices for more details.

Top Reasons Alberta Non-Profit Agencies Value Data Sharing

- better understand client population
- provide better service
- report on funding
- collaborate with other non-profits
- support research/ evaluation
- provide referrals to other non-profits

Zhang & Barbosa, *SAGE Not for Profit Data Capacity & Needs Assessment Survey.*



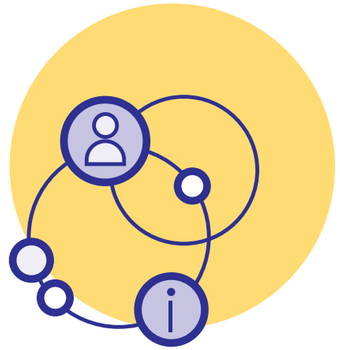
Political Factors

Alberta is entering a period of fiscal restraint in following the provincial election of the United Conservative Party in 2019. The recently released provincial budget (2019-2023) highlights areas of the government's priority as they relate to the work of providing social services. Of direct relevance to the work of Alberta's non-profit agencies, the budget identifies the creation of a civil society fund of $20 million to help community groups grow.[12] The UCP platform states that the newly elected Premier intends to create a council made up of charities to advise the government on how to best help community-based agencies do their work. Other platform ideas include supporting innovative cost-shared programs delivered by community groups and partnering with community agencies to deliver government services more efficiently.

At the federal level, the Liberal Party was elected back into office in 2019 for a second term, this time as a minority government. There is movement within the federal government to better support the non-profit sector. A special senate committee report on the state of the charitable sector in Canada was released in 2019. It's the first of its kind in years. Non-profit agencies consulted across the country told the committee their top concerns. Funding was the number one concern followed by competing and collaboration among agencies. The report outlines 42 recommendations to strengthen and improve the non-profit sector. Recommendations include providing stable funding for agencies, supporting social innovation and collaboration among agencies, financing initiatives to develop shared technologies among agencies, engaging regularly with the sector, and streamlining tax requirements.

In other areas, the federal government has committed $2.2 billion over the next 10 years to address homelessness. It also plans to create a social finance fund to support social innovation in the non-profit sector.

[12] Government of Alberta, Fiscal Plan: 2019–23.



Legislative Context

The Government of Alberta has developed a framework and vision to support information sharing among service delivery partners. The government's vision is that information sharing will improve service delivery through increased collaboration across government departments and across service delivery partners. The ultimate goal is to enable Albertans access to the right supports at the right time and to achieve better outcomes for people. The government has made available information sharing toolkits and online courses to help agencies move towards increased information sharing, which is in compliance with existing privacy legislation.

Despite this support, non-profit agencies have been reluctant to increase information sharing. In a recent survey, Alberta non-profits said their top reasons for not sharing data are: 1) privacy concerns, 2) legal limitations for sharing, and 3) lack of resources and time. Findings show that while just over a third of Alberta agencies surveyed said they share data, the majority of agencies said either they do not want to share data (24%), or they would like to but don't know how to (17%), or other/don't know (23%). These findings suggest the practice of sharing information is still in its infancy.[13]

[13] Zhang & Barbosa, SAGE Not-For-Profit Data Capacity & Needs Assessment Survey, pp. 5-6.

Type of Data Alberta Non-Profits are Interested in but Concerned About Sharing

1. program and service-related data
2. demographic data
3. outcome data
4. linked/integrated data across agencies

Zhang & Barbosa, *SAGE Not for Profit Data Capacity & Needs Assessment Survey.*

Overview of Agencies in the Youth Agency Collaboration

Recent reports of agencies participating in the Youth Agency Collaboration were gathered and analyzed for this report. Four out of the five agencies shared information. One agency was not able to because of information challenges experienced at the time of gathering. The following table summarizes key findings.

Summary of Agency Report Findings

Topic	Common Findings
Demographics of Vulnerable Youth Served	• age range: 12 to 24 • serve more males than females • key age group: 20 to 24 • Indigenous youth: 50% to 80% of all vulnerable youth served • high percentage of LGBTQ2S youth at some agencies • very few immigrant vulnerable youth served
Top Issues Facing Vulnerable Youth	• trauma • poverty • sexual abuse • abandonment/neglect • self-esteem
Trends	• increase in mental health and addictions needs • overrepresentation of vulnerable Indigenous youth • increasing importance of family reconnection • drug use: illicit drug use (crystal methamphetamine, fentanyl), alcohol and marijuana • increase in violence among youth, stemming especially from gang violence, and increased need for safe spaces for vulnerable youth
Funding	• range of funding from all government levels to no government funding and total dependence on fundraising • most agencies receive funding from government, foundations, and fundraising
Gaps and Barriers	• inadequate mental health and addictions support • long wait times for treatment • mental health and addictions issues create barriers for vulnerable youth to access services • inadequate monitoring of vulnerable youth's progress using tracking system • inadequate support for vulnerable LGBTQ2S youth • lack of adequate housing for vulnerable youth • limited hours to access services • lack of employment for vulnerable youth • lack of peer support
Evaluation Practices	• range of evaluation practices from basic to more rigorous including goals/outcomes analysis • range of what is being evaluated from programs to individual vulnerable youth outcomes • range of criteria used from subjective (eg. positive outcomes, not defined) to objective criteria • qualitative methods include direct observation and reporting with use vulnerable youth success stories • quantitative methods include surveys, acuity assessment scores, frequency counts of number of vulnerable youth served and number of programs used

Youth Comments on Safety Concerns While at Agencies

Vulnerable youth interviewed were almost split 50/50 when asked if they felt safe while visiting agencies for services. Some said yes, they feel safe, while others said no, they don't feel safe. Analysis shows that Indigenous youth tend to report feeling unsafe more so than non-Indigenous youth during the initial stage of reaching out to agencies. Of these Indigenous youth, they reported feeling unsafe related either to the location of the agency or to violence among other youth at the agency. Non-Indigenous youth who reported feeling unsafe shared the same concerns.

What's Working Well in Youth Services

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews

During engagement, YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth were asked their opinions on what's working well in the current youth services system. Their feedback identifies several things as working well and it shows that they agree on what is working well. The summary on the following page highlights the main themes for what's working well and presents some of the comments that are outlined in detail in the community engagement report in the appendices.

For more information, see the community engagement report in the appendices.

#1 Essential System Infrastructure

YACC Agency Staff	Youth
"Variety of youth serving agencies/offer diverse services."	"There's a lot of different programs that do different things. And that makes them pretty excellent."
"There is some good navigation in the system."	"Getting the basic needs met...They have food, here they have shelter."
"Welcoming entry."	"I appreciate that they're very welcoming."
"Youth are asking for help."	"I appreciate that they have a safe space to go to, most importantly."

#2 Quality of Services

YACC Agency Staff	Youth
"Links and other internal mental health supports."	"I know staff is there 24/7, basically everything from mental health, social health, they can reference me to pretty much anybody."
"Transitional housing."	"I always get the same treatment"
"We are better now at meeting [youth] where they are at."	"I appreciate the free services that they can offer and then they try to make it as fair to each and every youth as they can."

#3 Good Staff

YACC Agency Staff	Youth
"Good caring people in the system."	"The people, they're good workers. They're flexible, their hours and what they can give us."
"Willingness to help."	"If they don't have something, they will go out of their way and try to bring it here for you to access."

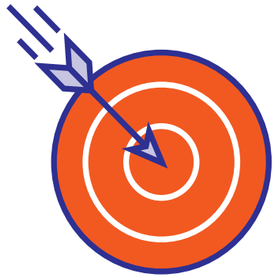
Goals of the Youth Services System

Data Sources: YACC Engagement

During engagement activities in 2019, YACC agency staff identified 12 common goals of the youth services system as it relates to vulnerable youth.

The 12 goals fall into three different categories:

1. goals that apply to the system as a whole.
2. goals that apply to agencies.
3. goals that apply to vulnerable youth.



For more information about the goals, see the community engagement report in the appendices.

12 Common Goals

System and Agency Goals

- Best Practices
  - **Agency Collaboration**
  - **Accessible Services**
  - **Flexible Services**
  - **Agency Personnel & Policies**
  - **Non-Judgmental Services**
- **Inclusive Services**
- **Youth-Relevant Services**
- **Client-Directed Services**
- **Financial Sustainability**

Vulnerable Youth Goals

- **Sustainable Independence**
- **Self-Actualization**
- **Community Empowerment**

Service Challenges

This report focuses attention on what could be improved in the delivery of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth. Four main service challenges emerged from analysis of the data gathered for this report including community engagement and research. They are listed below and will be explained with supporting information on the following pages. Each challenge in some capacity impacts the accessibility of services and the achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #1 Uncoordinated Access and Infrastructure

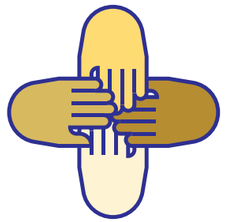
Uncoordinated and inconsistent access to services for vulnerable youth along with uncoordinated cross-agency administrative processes such as intake, evaluation, data sharing of client information, and training, resulting in impacts on accessibility of services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #2 Uncoordinated Youth Care Practices

Uncoordinated and inconsistent youth care practices across service providers resulting in an inadequate focus on prevention and healing including trauma support and harm reduction, thereby impacting accessibility of services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Service Challenge #3 Funding

Inadequate and inconsistent funding of vulnerable youth serving providers that does not adequately meet the needs of providers resulting in the creation of competition and self-preservation among providers, pitting them against one another.



Service Challenge #4 Collaboration and Communication

Inadequate collaboration among vulnerable youth serving providers mainly driven by self-preservation behaviours stemming from the competitive funding landscape but also driven by lack of trust and openness among providers.

Youth Comments: What Could Be Improved

"Like efficiency in regards to like, not feeling like our time isn't valued...So, to like have people prepared for that and agencies prepared for that, and like being aware to like, you know, this is my referral. I can give you two there and they can come to you or something....Yeah, just easily accessible, I guess it would be a plus."

"Like maybe they'll have just one database and then they could see who does what."

"It [agencies connecting youth to services] can be beneficial as long as it's not like a loop that leaves you, pushing you from people and place to place without having anything to provide."

Service Challenge #1 Uncoordinated Access and Infrastructure

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews, Literature Review

Uncoordinated and inconsistent access to services for vulnerable youth along with uncoordinated infrastructure in the form of cross-agency administrative processes such as intake, evaluation, data sharing of client information, and training, resulting in impacts on accessibility to services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Through community engagement, YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth identified the need for coordinating access to services and infrastructure as a top issue to help improve the delivery of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth.

Separately held engagement sessions with agency staff and vulnerable youth in 2019 reveal common understandings about the current vulnerable youth services system. While staff and vulnerable youth agree that some areas of the system are working well—such as the availability of many diverse services— they also agree that the current system could be doing better to address obstacles to accessing the various services.

During engagement sessions, staff said the system aspires to create a linear experience of services in which vulnerable youth smoothly and seamlessly go from one agency to another. However, staff said despite these aspirations, this is not the reality that Edmonton's vulnerable youth experience. Staff described the current youth services system as being difficult, confusing, colonized, and inflexible with gaps stemming from uncoordinated services that are not delivered in an organized and seamless process. Staff agreed "the bouncing ball metaphor" is an appropriate one to describe the experiences of vulnerable youth in the system. Staff said these circumstances leave vulnerable youth retraumatized as they seek services to meet their needs. Some staff also identified another obstacle: they said the system forces vulnerable youth to keep telling their personal story over and over with each agency visited. Other staff furthermore said the current system is set up to benefit only vulnerable youth who already have their own support to rely on, such as family or friends. Vulnerable youth without that support face even bigger challenges accessing services. In other words, depending on a vulnerable youth's circumstances, they may not have the same access to services that other vulnerable youth are experiencing.

Interviews with vulnerable youth confirm the perceptions of agency staff. Vulnerable youth were asked general questions about using services available in Edmonton. Their comments include services accessed at YACC agencies as well as at other agencies in the city. Analysis of the feedback shows that vulnerable Indigenous youth are "bouncing" from agency to agency far more frequently than are vulnerable non-Indigenous youth to get their needs met. In the sample, vulnerable Indigenous youth visited an average of six agencies whereas vulnerable non-Indigenous youth visited an average three agencies. Of those agencies visited, vulnerable Indigenous youth accessed services from more community and government agencies than did vulnerable non-Indigenous youth.

Vulnerable youth shared stories of their experiences accessing services in Edmonton, many of which point to the problem of uncoordinated services. One youth said: "It can be beneficial as long as it's not like a loop that leaves you pushing you from people and place to place without having anything to provide." Another youth shared an anecdote to make her point: "You're supposed to help me. I'm here because I need your help. And then they'll be like, 'I still can't help you, I'm sorry.' And I'm like, what would you like? Why are you even here? What do you get paid for? I just got a recommendation from somebody to come here." Another youth said the following while discussing what could be improved: "Like efficiency in regards to not feeling like our time isn't valued."

Stories from other vulnerable youth point to the need for coordinated and streamlined infrastructure among agencies, especially when it comes to their personal information. "Maybe they'll have just one database and then they could see who does what," one youth said. Another one felt overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork and processes required to access services: "Yeah, so that's too much for me."

Feedback from agency staff show they are ready to tackle these challenges head on by coordinating service access and infrastructure. Staff identified agencies could better coordinate such things as intake processes and hours of service availability, for example. They also said more consistent delivery of services could be achieved by agencies coordinating key administrative areas like staff training and evaluation. Things like administrative processes, services and data related to clients are considered types of infrastructure worthy of coordinating according to leading research on collaborative youth services models. Indeed, some evidence shows that shared infrastructure among agencies positively contributes to coordinated services.[14]

[14] Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health*, p. 12

YAC agency staff comments What Could Be Improved

"Coordinated access"

"Service coordination"

"Access to all for all"

"Consistency of system, metrics, languaging, training"

"[Youth] not needing to retell story"

Service Challenge #2
Uncoordinated Youth Care Practices

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews, Lit Review

Uncoordinated and inconsistent youth care practices across service providers resulting in an inadequate focus on prevention and healing including trauma support and harm reduction, thereby impacting accessibility of services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Improving youth care practices emerged as a high priority during engagement sessions with YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth.

Providing care that meets the diverse needs of vulnerable youth is critical in the work of agencies as they seek to improve the social and health well-being outcomes of vulnerable youth. During engagement sessions, YACC agency staff said inconsistent training for staff is an issue of concern. They said while staff are caring and compassionate people and are committed to the principles of non-judgment, harm reduction and trauma-informed care, discrepancies in care practices remain. For example, some staff may be trauma-informed while others are not. Staff said agencies have made progress in providing better mental health and housing supports for vulnerable youth, two areas especially high in demand. However, more work remains to be done in those areas along with addictions services in order to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable youth. Staff said consistency in practices among agencies is needed in prevention and post-care services with a focus on healing, addictions, trauma support, family reconnection, and harm reduction. Their comments highlight the role that a more coordinated care model could play to improve youth care practices, to increase equal and equitable access to it such as through early prevention, and ultimately to improve outcomes for vulnerable youth with diverse needs. Their comments also echo findings from leading research on collaborative care models for mental health services. It shows collaborative care is especially needed for the successful care of vulnerable youth with high needs.[15]

Feedback shows vulnerable youth agree that care practices are a top priority when it comes to what could be improved in the youth services system. It also points to some challenges facing vulnerable youth, especially vulnerable Indigenous youth, when accessing services. Vulnerable youth said, as a top suggestion, providing more support for them to access services would help improve care practices. Some youth said, for example, they want agency staff to accompany them and help them as they seek services because they feel negative emotions such as being overwhelmed and scared. These comments suggest that such support might be able to help increase equal and equitable access to services and care for vulnerable youth who need help accessing services. Other suggestions from youth include better mental health supports, extended eligibility criteria for services to include older vulnerable youth, more training for social workers, and more inclusive clothing provisions that especially meet the needs of males. Indeed, research supports some of these suggestions. It shows that in some collaborative models of care, agencies do identify specific staff to help vulnerable youth gain access to services and to coordinate care across different specialists.[16]

Moreover, feedback also shows that some vulnerable Indigenous youth perceive discrimination as impacting access to the services and care they need. Two youth shared this feedback. Their comments were unsolicited. One youth said about some vulnerable youth serving agencies: "You know, they are discriminatory against you, and there's systemic discrimination as well in themselves. And they've put it on to you to help you less than their other vulnerable youth." The other youth mentioned discrimination while discussing experiences sharing personal information: "Well, they thought I was lying at first. I told him I wasn't lying. I told them the truth, and they still didn't help me. They think I'm homeless, so I must be lying. I must be high on drugs or something, so it's like discrimination and racism." Research suggests these vulnerable youth are not alone in their experiences of barriers to access services. It highlights structural racism and societal stereotypes as impacting vulnerable Indigenous youth in Canada as they access services. It also points to the lack of culturally appropriate and specific services designed for vulnerable Indigenous youth as yet another area in need of improvement to provide care to this vulnerable youth population.[17]

Not only do vulnerable youth and staff agree that improvements to youth care practices are needed, they also share common understanding of the emotional experiences that vulnerable youth endure as they seek services. Vulnerable youth said they experienced far more negative emotions than positive ones while seeking services from agencies, and they often experienced both at the same time. This reality largely stems from their circumstances, which include trauma. Examples of negative emotions include: anxious, depressed, scared, hopeless and drained; positive ones include relieved, supported and joyful as they receive help from agencies. During engagement activities, agency staff said the same thing about a fictional vulnerable youth's emotional experiences as they accessed services to meet their needs. Mutual understanding about the emotional experiences of vulnerable youth may help lay the groundwork needed to start improving youth care practices in ways that meet the diverse needs of youth and adapt to their unique circumstances.

[15] Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health*, p. 13.

[16] Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health*, p. 12.

[17] Centre Hope, *A literature review of collaborative models in youth services: Emerging best practices*. The literature review can be found in the appendices of this report.

Youth Comments on Youth Care Practices

"And [they] should have a youth worker to help take them to places…. the worker can set a date, you can go with them to wherever, you know. That would have been way easier. You don't know what to expect the first time. You don't know what to do."

"I think there should be a much higher standard for the education levels of people who can become Social workers…."

"So maybe if I had a mental health phone line where you can just call in and be like, I need these services and resources because my mental health is weak."

"I feel like the guys get excluded with the clothes."

"Collaborative care was found to be essential for the successful care of youth with high needs."

Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health.*

Sample YACC agency staff comments:

"Better funding needed."

"Multi-year funding."

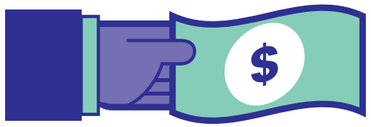
"Block funding."

"Funders trust that organizations can use funds appropriately without binding outcomes."

"Take direction from experts."

"Agencies need to play the key role in defining what they hope to achieve and not funders."

"Consistency of government."



Service Challenge #3
Funding

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews, General Research

Inadequate and inconsistent funding of vulnerable youth serving agencies, resulting in the creation of competition among agencies, which ends up pitting them against one another for limited dollars.

Funding emerged as yet another high priority in need of improvement in the delivery of services to vulnerable youth, according to YACC agency staff.

Agency staff said they face ongoing challenges to meet the diverse and growing complex needs of vulnerable youth due to lack of sustainable and consistent funding. Without adequate stable funding, agencies are forced to do as best they can to provide services within their limitations.

And some vulnerable youth are noticing the impacts of funding. One youth said, for example: "Some locations just aren't big enough and don't have the funding and the resources to provide a service as good as they would want to, you know. It's not that people don't want to help you that much, it's that people can only stand within their limitations." Another youth added when asked what could be improved in the youth services system: "Maybe more staffing, because more staffing, the more we're able to deal with the quantity of clients and whatnot."

Agency staff pointed to other negative consequences of inadequate stable funding, one they said is having a big impact: the creation of competition among agencies to acquire limited funding dollars. Staff said the funding landscape in which they must work ends up pitting agencies against one another. Ultimately, they end up competing out of an act of self-preservation to ensure their agency, its mission and staff are able to continue to provide services to meet the needs of vulnerable youth who come to their agency looking for help. Recent research in Canada on the charitable sector shows YACC agency staff are not alone in this view. Findings in a recent special Canadian senate committee report show that funding is the top concern for non-profit agencies and charities across the country, especially as it relates to administrative cost such as staffing. It also shows that competition for funding, be it for government or donation funds, emerged as yet another top concern.[18]

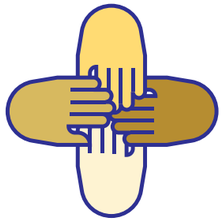
In short, funding matters a lot. Agency staff said ultimately, the funding system needs to change and it needs to be improved. They said any improvements must be driven by agencies in order to make the right improvements. Comments from staff reveal frustration at currently not being able to influence a significant external driver of the provision of services to vulnerable youth, namely the funders of services. Staff said a big part of meeting funding requirements is achieving outcomes for vulnerable youth, but they often face challenges doing this given the nature of meeting the high and complex needs of vulnerable youth. Staff said funders need to work with agencies and listen to them to identify appropriate outcomes linked to funding.

[18] Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, *Catalyst for Change*, p. 141.

Top 5 Challenges Facing Canadian Non-Profits

1. Funding for administrative costs
2. Funding for projects
3. Competing and collaborating with other non-profits
4. Finding and/or keeping volunteers
5. Board governance

Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, *Catalyst for change.*



Service Challenge #4
Collaboration and Communication

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews, Literature Review, General Research

Ineffective and inefficient collaboration and communication among vulnerable youth serving agencies driven largely by competition for funding but also by a lack of trust among agencies.

While collaboration between vulnerable youth serving agencies has been happening, YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth identified collaboration and communication as one of the top priorities for improvement.

Currently, there are several different initiatives in Edmonton aimed at increasing collaboration among vulnerable youth serving agencies. While agencies participating in these initiatives are doing good work, YACC agency staff said there is still room to improve and increase collaboration. That's mainly because of the challenges created by the competitive funding landscape, which tends to foster adversarial relationships among agencies. Besides funding hampering efforts to collaborate, some staff also said there is a lack of trust and openness among agencies and within the entire system in general. In such a landscape, it's understandable why YACC agency staff say collaboration is a challenge. In fact, their views are shared among agencies across Canada. In a recent special Canadian senate committee report, Canadian agencies surveyed ranked collaboration as their second greatest challenge after funding.[19] In light of this, one can appreciate the impact that competitiveness and adversarialism must be having on the willingness of agencies to work collaboratively in new innovative ways.

Despite these challenges, YACC agency staff suggested ways to improve collaboration. Staff said, for example, that it needs to be more "streamlined" and "strategic." They also said there is room for more effective communication among agencies. Their comments underscore the importance of creating intentional collaboration, one with a well-defined purpose and vision including outcomes.

[19] Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, *Catalyst for Change*, p. 136.

Sample YACC agency staff comments: What Could Be Improved

"Collaboration streamlined."

"Better communication as to how policies need to work to make both systems and service providers happy."

"Not compete."

"System trust service providers to know how to best support individuals."

"Be strategic."

Feedback shows vulnerable youth would welcome such efforts to improve collaboration. Some vulnerable youth specifically identified that more collaboration is required. For example, one youth said it's needed in order to help as many vulnerable youth as possible. Another youth said, acknowledging current efforts to collaborate: "I think that if it's possible, the agencies should work together more, even though they do as much as possible." At the same time, however, vulnerable youth also understand the challenges facing agencies. One youth observed, hinting at the problem of inadequate funding: "I feel like because of the low number of staff…that there's not enough time to reach out to other agencies."

Vulnerable youth also identified improvements in communication as being equally important for agencies to address. Youth identified two main areas: 1) consistency in communication and 2) more effective and clear communication about the services available to vulnerable youth. One youth said about the need for consistent communication: "If they could stay consistent, they stay talking with who they are working with. Talk amongst each other and make everything more clear." This comment highlights the need for maintained communication with vulnerable youth, collaboration among agencies/and or staff, and efficiency in service provision. Another youth's comment points to the need for maintaining communication with vulnerable youth throughout their entire journey seeking services within the system, including when they exit it. The youth said, hinting at a gap: "As soon as they feel they've accomplished the job [ie. meet their needs], they don't fully put into the effort or the communication doesn't seem to add up anymore."

Other comments from vulnerable youth are about providing more and better communication about available services. One youth said, for example, hinting at a more collaborative approach to disseminating information: "More information about other programs. Even though the agencies are separate, they should provide more information about the separate agencies." Another youth added that promotional materials need to be easier to read. "The resource pamphlets should be drawn out better. I know they have categories and things like that, but to make all those phone calls is very intimidating." These comments highlight the importance of improving agency collaboration and communication as a way to help increase vulnerable youth's access to services.

Youth Comments on Collaboration & Communication: What Could Be Improved

"More collaboration for sure. Collaboration is definitely necessary in regards to client services and frontline workers being able to like help as many people as they can."

"If they could stay consistent, they stay talking with who they are working with. Talk amongst each other and make everything more clear."

"…organizations choosing to collaborate tend to engage several partners at a time. This finding suggests that collaboration may be a mindset, and those who adopt it might be more willing to repeat the experience with other partners. A great challenge to the sector however, is its size and diversity. It is difficult to coordinate voices, let alone come to some form of consensus around issues."

Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. *Reflections on civil society.*

A Snapshot of the Youth Services System in Edmonton

A snapshot of the current system in Edmonton as it relates to vulnerable youth is emerging following examination of each of the four main service challenges identified in this report. While several service areas in need of improvement were identified by YACC agencies and vulnerable youth, the following four service challenges were the top ones they identified:

Service Challenge #1
Uncoordinated Access and Infrastructure

Service Challenge #2
Uncoordinated Youth Care Practices

Service Challenge #3
Funding

Service Challenge #4
Collaboration and Communication

Looked at together, these service challenges help paint a picture of the gaps within the current system to meet the needs of vulnerable youth in Edmonton. The picture represents a starting point to help increase common understanding of the systems-level challenges facing vulnerable youth serving agencies and to begin to find solutions. This picture is illustrated in the infographic on the following page called Snapshot of the Current Youth Services System. While this picture is incomplete, it does provide a snapshot based on authentic feedback from agency staff who work within the system providing services to vulnerable youth and from vulnerable youth who are using or have used those services. The feedback shows that indeed, some areas within the current system are working well, such as the availability of many diverse services for vulnerable youth in Edmonton as outlined in the community engagement report in the appendices. The focus of this report, however, is feedback on what could be improved to address the gaps in services for vulnerable youth.

The feedback highlights gaps stemming from system-wide challenges to provide services to vulnerable youth. Collectively, these identified challenges impact the good intentions of agencies and all other members of the system to provide timely, effective access to services and care that meets the diverse needs of vulnerable youth. The feedback suggests that despite good intentions, the youth services system often ends up providing inadequately coordinated and inconsistent access to services to vulnerable youth, as well as inconsistent and uncoordinated care to meet the complex needs of vulnerable youth facing such issues as mental health, addictions and trauma. Vulnerable youth who seek services are impacted by these gaps. As a result, vulnerable youth often must go from agency to agency to get help, only to find out sometimes that the agency can't help them. Vulnerable youth also reported they often have to rely mainly on themselves to get the services they need. Feedback indicates that vulnerable Indigenous youth especially may be disproportionately bearing the brunt of these service gaps.

Other feedback shows that despite good intentions, community agencies find themselves inadequately funded and forced to compete with other agencies for limited funding dollars. This situation, in turn, makes it challenging for agencies to build trusting relationships among themselves and ultimately hampers their efforts to collaborate effectively to provide better services to vulnerable youth.

The infographic on the following page highlights key aspects of the four main service challenges addressed in this report. According to the findings, it illustrates two distinct experiences of vulnerable youth within the current youth services system: one for vulnerable Indigenous youth, the other for vulnerable non-Indigenous youth. It also illustrates the lack of coordinated access and infrastructure, and uncoordinated care. It depicts the lack of adequate structured collaboration in the current system, the significant role of inadequate funding, and the lack of evaluation and tracking of collective goals and outcomes.

The Nature of Systems

The challenges identified in this report are systems-level challenges. They are not the responsibility of any one specific agency. Instead they are the result of the interactions among the several members of the youth services system including non-profit community agencies, private sector agencies, governments, health agencies, and funders of youth services.

Snapshot of Current Youth Services System

This infographic highlights two different stories related to the current experiences of vulnerable youth, according to this report's findings. The infographic shows vulnerable Indigenous youth are visiting more agencies than vulnerable non-Indigenous youth. Despite this difference, both vulnerable youth populations similarly report experiencing far more negative emotions than positive ones while seeking help from agencies. Funding is depicted as framing the infographic given its central role in influencing the delivery and experience of services provided to vulnerable youth. The infographic identifies the current problem of inconsistent funding with a discontinuous frame. Agencies report their own individual outcomes and submit results to funders. The orange target in the infographic represents outcome tracking. It serves to highlight, however, the lack of system-wide tracking to determine the ability of the system as a whole to achieve common outcomes or goals, such as improving the social and health well-being of vulnerable youth.

Implications for Addressing Challenges

Based on analysis of the data, underlying needs statements were developed to address the main service challenges discussed in this report. The statements are presented as they correspond to each of the main service challenges. The following statements were developed using feedback from YACC agency staff, vulnerable youth, and research conducted for this report including the literature review.

Identified Needs for Service Challenge #1 Uncoordinated Access and Infrastructure

Uncoordinated and inconsistent access to services for vulnerable youth along with uncoordinated infrastructure in the form of cross-agency administrative processes such as intake, evaluation, data sharing of client information, and training, resulting in impacts on accessibility to services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

- Coordinate service access among agencies in order to provide consistent, streamlined, and equal and equitable service access to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable youth.
- As part of the coordination, streamline access especially for vulnerable youth with high or complex needs including Indigenous populations and other populations of vulnerable youth requiring tailored care such as LGBTQ2S youth and any other emerging vulnerable youth populations.
- Coordinate service provision so that it considers geographical coverage and hours of services.
- Create faster access to relevant services that meet the immediate and long-term needs of diverse vulnerable youth.
- Coordinate other infrastructure among agencies to create common cross-administrative processes such as:
    - Coordinated intake processes that facilitate sharing of comprehensive information on the services available in Edmonton aimed at vulnerable youth.
    - Coordinated data gathering and sharing of client information, which captures adequate and relevant quality information including demographic data and service information to facilitate access to services, continuous learning and improvement, services review, research, and evaluation.
    - Coordinated evaluation and outcome tracking including the creation of collective outcomes, consistent use of metrics, common data collection practices.
    - Coordinated training and usage of tools.
    - Coordinated policies to support implementation of coordinated access and infrastructure.

"Shared infrastructure has been identified as positively contributing to service coordination and integration."

As cited in Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health.*

Identified Needs for Service Challenge #2
Uncoordinated Youth Care Practices

Uncoordinated and inconsistent youth care practices across service providers resulting in an inadequate focus on prevention and healing including trauma support and harm reduction, thereby impacting accessibility of services and achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth.

- Coordinate youth care practices to facilitate provision of consistent equal, equitable, and inclusive access to care that meets the needs of diverse vulnerable youth populations.
- Coordinate care practices based on evidence-based approaches for prevention and healing with a focus on trauma support, harm reduction, addictions, cultural sensitivity to vulnerable Indigenous youth, and family reconnection.
- Develop improved and coordinated training opportunities to ensure consistent care for vulnerable youth and sustainable use of resources.
- Increase vulnerable youth care practices that meet the needs of diverse vulnerable youth from prevention through to post-care service support thereby increasing achievement of positive outcomes for vulnerable youth.
- Create coordinated vulnerable youth care practices that are client-centred and client-directed to empower vulnerable youth in decision-making about their care.
- Increase efforts in coordinating care provision in mental health, housing and addictions, looking for new partnerships and opportunities to build on current efforts to improve service delivery in these areas.
- To provide equal, equitable, and timely access to services for vulnerable youth, develop multiple pathways to access care such as self-referral, walk-in/drop-in, online access, early intervention, and outreach services to vulnerable youth requiring support to access services.[20]

[20] Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health*, p. 13.

Identified Needs for Service Challenge #3
Funding

Inadequate and inconsistent funding of vulnerable youth serving agencies, resulting in the creation of competition among agencies, which ends up pitting them against one another for limited dollars.

- Develop a strategy among vulnerable youth serving agencies to create and implement a new collaborative funding approach to obtain support from funders for an innovative collaborative service model for vulnerable youth.
- Participate in and/or create opportunities to influence decision-makers to make changes to funding to accomplish such things as:
  - more appropriate outcomes linked to funding based on agencies' feedback.
  - more adequate, consistent and sustainable funding for service providers focused on helping vulnerable youth, especially for innovative collaborative models aimed at improving the delivery of services for vulnerable youth.
- Develop more trusting and open relationships with agencies in order to create collaborative approaches to funding that support the creation of a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.

"Despite political and economic uncertainties, now is the time to be assertive – to step up and speak out. As the political and economic contexts shift, the mission of each nonprofit organization continues to evolve."

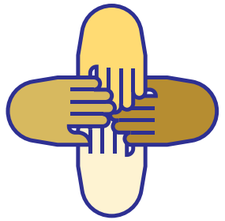
Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. *Reflections on civil society.*

Youth Comment on Collaboration

"I feel like because of the low number of staff... that there's not enough time to reach out to other agencies."

"The use of a single, shared health record to facilitate collaboration and streamline care was mentioned in several documents."

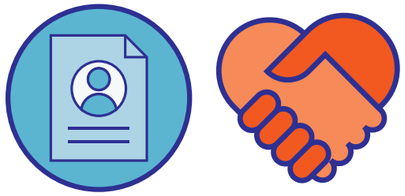
Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health.*



Identified Needs for Service Challenge #4 Collaboration and Communication

Ineffective and inefficient collaboration and communication among vulnerable youth serving agencies driven largely by competition for funding but also by a lack of trust among agencies.

- Create and implement a strategy focusing resources on a collaborative model that is structured with a well-defined common purpose, vision, roles, funding strategy, and expected outcomes for coordinated access and infrastructure and coordinated care.
- Increase trust and build relationships among agencies by participating in a collaborative model that relies on increased collaboration and communication to make it successful.
- Make increasing trust among agencies one of the outcomes of a collaborative youth services model.
- Increase awareness and knowledge among vulnerable youth serving agencies of the comprehensive services available in Edmonton to help vulnerable youth.
- Implement and use technology for sharing client information and increasing opportunities for effective collaboration and communication.
- Increase collaboration and communication with vulnerable youth by engaging them as part of the strategy to develop a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.
- Improve and streamline communication with vulnerable youth by using technology that enables agencies to share and communicate reliable, updated and consistent client information and available services.
- Improve communication with vulnerable youth by ensuring communication is consistently maintained from entry into the youth services system, to exiting services and to post-care support.
- Improve communication with vulnerable youth about available services by ensuring all forms of communication are clear and easily understood with use of simple language and effective design.
- Increase effective dissemination of information through multiple channels to better inform vulnerable youth of the services and programs available to help them make decisions about the care they need.



Primary Challenge

Coordinated Access & Infrastructure and Coordinated Care

The needs statements presented in this report were further reviewed to see if any of the four service challenges could be identified as a strategic lever facilitating the change needed to implement a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth. Based on the data and evidence gathered, two main service challenges emerge as top priorities to address for leveraging change: 1) uncoordinated access and infrastructure and 2) uncoordinated youth care practices. These two service challenges emerged as the top issue requiring improvement according to YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth. Coordinating infrastructure and coordinating care are furthermore identified as areas of key drivers of collaboration and change, according to leading research on collaborative youth services models.[21]

Developing a collaborative model founded on coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care will require unique approaches to funding. While funding is yet another top challenge identified by agency staff, developing a collaborative funding strategy is recommended to help secure financial support for an innovative collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth. With a strong plan for implementing a collaborative model, which strives to increase collaboration among agencies to help improve access to services and increase positive outcomes for vulnerable youth, funders may be willing to support such a plan. Indeed, there is momentum building across Canada to support innovation in the delivery of social services and to better support non-profit agencies in their efforts to collaborate to provide those services.

[21] Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health.*

"System wide change occurs when levers can instigate needed changes across the system. This requires system parts that are either powerful enough and/or connected enough within the system to leverage systemic change."

Foster-Fishman et al. *Putting the system back into systems change.*

Recommendations

Data Sources: YACC Engagement, Youth Interviews, Literature Review, General Research

Seven recommendations were developed to provide direction for creating a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth, which addresses current gaps in the system. The recommendations stem from the identified service challenges and need statements presented in this report. Together, they support the development of a strategic collaborative model that seeks to achieve systems-level change resulting in the delivery of coordinated and seamless services for vulnerable youth. The model is based on achieving collective goals including improved outcomes for vulnerable youth. Feedback from YACC agency staff and vulnerable youth supports movement in this direction and is backed up by evidence gathered to write this report including the literature review. The recommendations also align with increasing interest among governments to support collaborative approaches to service delivery.

Recommendation #1
Coordinated Access & Infrastructure

Create a collaborative model of service provision founded on coordinated access and infrastructure as a way to increase access to services in a streamlined, consistent, timely and effective way that meets the diverse needs of vulnerable youth.

Recommendation #2
Coordinated Care

Create coordinated youth care practices founded on evidence-informed, inclusive and culturally appropriate approaches with a focus on prevention and post-care follow-up as a key step towards improving consistent access to quality services in sustainable ways and increasing achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth with diverse needs.

Recommendation #3
Coordinated Information Sharing

Make a top priority implementation of collective data gathering and sharing among agencies through shared technology as a key enabler of collaboration through coordination of access, infrastructure and care, leading to a one-client/one-record-approach to service delivery.

Recommendation #4
Strategic Coordination

Phase in coordinated access and infrastructure and coordinated care by strategically focusing on key areas to coordinate that are critical for launching the collaborative model such as access, intake, evaluation, and training, thereby effectively managing change to ensure success.

Recommendation #5
Youth Engagement

Make a top priority engagement of vulnerable youth in the creation of a collaborative service model including efforts to implement consistent youth-centred or client-directed care as well as efforts to improve communication with vulnerable youth as outlined in this report.

Recommendation #6
Coordinated Funding

Develop an innovative collaborative funding approach to obtain adequate and sustainable support for the collaborative youth services model.

Recommendation #7
Collaborative Partnerships

As part of the collaborative youth services model, develop plans to extend partnerships and build trust with other service providers, academic institutions, and collaborations in Edmonton as a way to further increase access to services for vulnerable youth, increase positive outcomes for vulnerable youth, and ensure the success of the collaborative model.

Evidence Supporting the Seven Recommendations

Research was conducted to determine if the seven recommendations presented in this report can be corroborated in similar reports on improving service delivery. A total of 16 reports were analyzed. They show strong support across all the recommendations made in this report. Here are the top 3 most strongly supported recommendations based on correlated recommendations found in other reports.

Recommendation #2: Coordinated Care

Support:
62 recommendations in 12 reports

Recommendation #1: Coordinated Access & Infrastructure

Support:
30 recommendations in 11 reports

Recommendation #4: Strategic Coordination

Support:
22 recommendations in 10 reports

See the appendices for a table outlining the complete findings.

Strategic Direction for Collaborative Youth Services Model

The recommendations in this report point to actionable steps that can be taken to begin to introduce systems change in the provision of services to Edmonton's vulnerable youth through a collaborative model of service delivery. The recommendations create a roadmap for change founded on a strategic collective and collaborative purpose, vision, and outcomes including collaborative use of resources. According to the findings presented in this report, coordinating access and infrastructure, and coordinating care emerged as strategic levers to facilitate collaborative and impactful change in the youth services system.

Strategic Direction

The following statements provide strategic direction to implement a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth. They present a roadmap that explains how and why change will take place to help address gaps in the youth services system and to work towards making collaborative improvements at a systems level.

Implementing coordinated infrastructure for efficient data collection and sharing among vulnerable youth serving agencies will play a key role in enabling effective collaboration to facilitate coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care for a collaborative youth services model aimed at increasing consistent and timely access to services and increasing positive outcomes for vulnerable youth. Technology will support this coordination of data sharing. Engaging vulnerable youth will also play a key role in the creation of a collaborative model to ensure the diverse needs of vulnerable youth are adequately addressed. Developing a funding strategy based on collaborative use of resources will help enable adequate and sustainable funding to implement a collaborative youth services model. Moving in this strategic direction will help facilitate impactful systems-level change that results in better provision of services, achievement of collective goals, and sustainable use of resources.

Infographic—Collaborative Youth Services Model

The infographic on the following page highlights key aspects of a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth, which addresses potential solutions to the four main service challenges identified in this report. The infographic illustrates a consistent and more seamless experience of services for vulnerable youth, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous, resulting in positive outcomes for vulnerable youth. It does this by depicting coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care through the use of shared technology. The technology facilitates improved information sharing among agencies and improved collaboration and communication. This, in turn, results in improved and consistent communication between agencies and vulnerable youth, and improved evaluation and monitoring of collective goals and outcomes. The infographic depicts adequate funding has been secured to implement the collaborative model and it connects outcomes to funding.

Youth Comment on YAC project

"I think doing this collaboration is going to benefit a lot of clients and connect them with resources that are interconnected between the agencies. So I think that's helpful."

Common Principles of Community Youth Service Hub Models

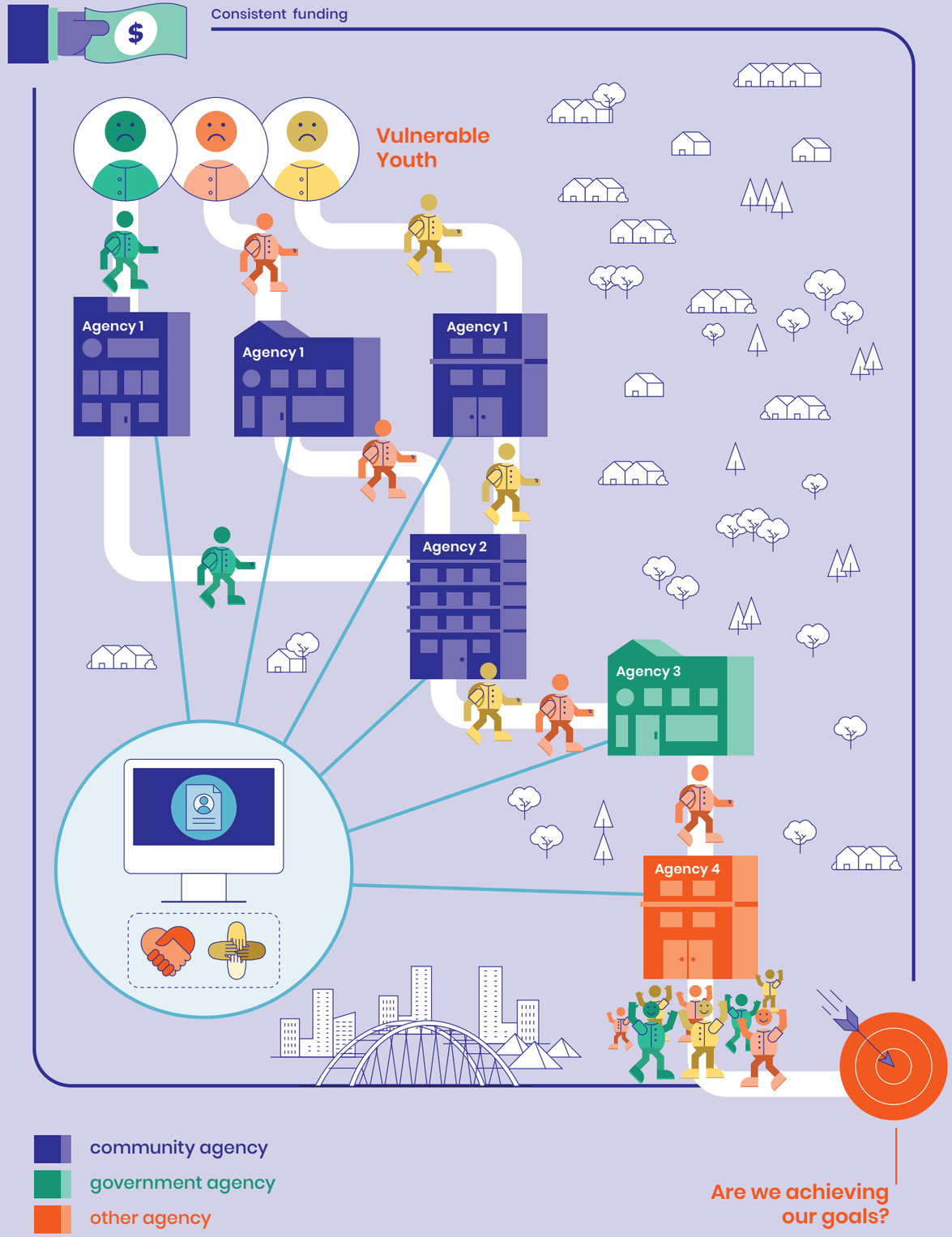
Leading research identifies universal principles for coordinating care:

- Improving access to care and early intervention
- Youth and family engagement and participation
- Youth-friendly settings and services
- Evidence-informed approaches
- Partnerships and collaboration

Settipani et al., *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health.*

Collaborative Youth Services System Model

This infographic highlights improvements in the delivery of services to vulnerable youth based on a collaborative model among several agencies. It illustrates a more seamless and consistent experience of services for vulnerable youth. In the upper left-hand corner, three different vulnerable youth each visit a different agency. In this model, agencies are engaged in more system-wide coordinated information sharing related to helping the vulnerable youth. This coordinated approach is depicted by the circle in the left bottom corner with its radiating lines connecting to all the agencies. The circle includes icons indicating that care, infrastructure such as information sharing, and collaboration are coordinated. As a result of the coordination, the vulnerable youth experience equal and equitable access to services. No matter their different needs and circumstances, the vulnerable youth each experience consistency in the standard of services they receive. This is illustrated by one common and consistent path for all the vulnerable youth. In this model, consistent funding has been obtained to support the collaboration among agencies. Lastly, a collective approach to evaluating the outcomes of the system as a whole has been implemented. The orange target illustrates this approach. It shows the coordinated efforts of agencies has helped achieve common outcomes they all are striving towards to better the lives of the vulnerable youth.



Key Role of Strategic Planning

"We have also noted that respondents who report having a strategic plan are more likely to have intentionally collaborated with other organizations. This finding is not surprising given that attention to strategic planning has been linked to less insular thinking and more active collaboration with other organizations".[32]"

Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. *Reflections on civil society.*

Next Steps

The strategic direction presented in this report provides a guideline for implementing the seven recommendations. Agencies committed to implementing a collaborative youth services model will require time and resources to participate in a coalition dedicated to launching a pilot. They will play a key role in the next steps to influence and implement a strategic plan to create the collaborative model. Engaging with vulnerable youth during the next steps will also play a key role as will developing a collaborative funding strategy to support the work required to make the pilot a success. As with all change initiatives, creating a change management plan to support successful implementation of the recommendations is advised.

The chart on the following pages outlines the next steps to create and implement successfully a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth. It outlines a collaborative and innovative process driven by regularly scheduled engagement with all key stakeholders and founded on the principles of change management. Anticipated costs primarily include:

- Costs for all necessary coordinated access and infrastructure (technological, information/policy and protocols) needed to support a collaborative model such as secure information sharing and evaluation framework development as well as any training required for coordination.
- Costs in the form of appropriate compensation to acknowledge time/resources required from different stakeholders (eg. participating agencies, vulnerable youth).
- Costs for a third-party project and stakeholder engagement coordinator/facilitator.

Next Steps for Collaborative Youth Services Model

Immediate and Short-Term (12 Months)

Planning & Preparation Phase

- Create a communication and outreach plan to disseminate findings of the YAC report.
- Formalize a dedicated coalition of agencies to lead the development and launch of a pilot for a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth, complete with governance details including membership and role responsibilities.
- Develop engagement plan to guide the project including engagement with agencies and vulnerable youth and other stakeholders as seen appropriate.
- As a coalition, co-create a budget plan identifying resources needed and costs to launch a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.
- Develop a collaborative funding strategy to cover the costs associated with the different phases of the project: includes approaches to multiple funders including government, foundations and private sector.
- Develop strategic partnership plan with other service providers, academic institutions and other collaborations in Edmonton.
- Develop a communication strategy to support the coalition/ collaborative youth services model.
- Develop a change management plan to support a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.
- Strategize the coordination of access and infrastructure necessary for the collaborative youth services model including: data sharing, intake, evaluation and training.
- Produce an inventory of current infrastructure among the coalition members agencies including: technological, information/policy and protocols
- Create a data plan on types of collective information to be shared.
- Strategize coordinated care practices needed to create consistency, to increase accessibility of services, and to improve outcomes for vulnerable youth.
- Develop an evaluation plan for monitoring the milestones of the project and meeting the needs of funders and agency boards.

Development Phase

- Create and document policies, protocols, processes needed to support coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care; includes collective information sharing agreements.
- Includes collective information sharing agreements
- Set up all necessary coordinated infrastructure such as technological solutions.
- Conduct usability testing needed to coordinate access and infrastructure including testing of technology and processes and make needed adaptations.
- Develop and write an evaluation framework for the project including, outcomes, measures and instruments.
- Create a training plan and develop appropriate training materials to support coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care model.
- Develop all required communication, engagement and change management materials required to support implementation of a collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.

Mid-Term (12-24 Months)

Implementation Phase

- Conduct training on all the policies, protocols, and processes needed to support coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care in order to launch the collaborative youth services model.
- Set up technological infrastructure required to support coordinated access and care through improved data sharing and collective evaluation and monitoring.
- Implement an evaluation framework for the project including outcomes and measures.
- Conduct testing of all procedures to prepare for the official launch of pilot.
- Execute communication, engagement and change management plans to support the implementation of a collaborative service model.
- Officially launch the operation of the collaborative youth services model.

Long Term (24-36 Months)

Evaluation Phase

- Schedule regular intervals for monitoring and tracking of the collaborative youth services model.
- Develop training on using data collection to support evidence-based decision-making.
- Make adjustments to the coordinated access and infrastructure, and coordinated care model based on data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and feedback.
- Evaluate the outcomes that were strategically developed for the collaborative youth services model.
- Based on the findings, make evidence-based decisions on the success of the collaborative service model aimed at vulnerable youth.
- Develop a final report based on learnings from the collaborative youth services model and recommendations for next steps.

Activities applying to all stages of project:

- Communication with all stakeholders on a regular basis.
- Regularly scheduled engagement sessions with all relevant stakeholders to obtain necessary feedback to for decision making related to the project milestones are met.
- Implementation of the communication strategy throughout the project.
- Reviewing and monitoring all plans related to the project and making appropriate adjustments to ensure milestones are achieved.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Youth Agency Collaboration Committee
Engagement Report

What You Told Us
2019

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Engagement Details

Between April and September 2019, several engagement sessions were held with the five agencies participating in the Youth Agency Collaboration Committee (YACC) to increase understanding of the youth services system in Edmonton. The agencies are:

- Boyle Street Community Services
- Edmonton John Howard Society
- iHuman Youth Society
- Old Strathcona Youth Society
- Youth Empowerment and Support Services.

Through activities led by a facilitator, agency staff were guided through a collaborative engagement process grounded in systems thinking to increase understanding of the current provision of youth services with the purpose of identifying what is working well, what are current gaps, and what could be improved. Engagement activities included individual and group-based participation. Best practices in systems thinking were implemented using a technique called DrawToast, designed by Tom Wujec as part of his Wicked Problem Solving™ toolkit for solving complex problems. Using the technique, engagement activities culminated with the co-creation of a visual map that illustrates a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience of youth services in Edmonton. With feedback provided by agencies about the vulnerable youth they serve, the fictitious youth was created as part of the mapping activities. The vulnerable youth was described as requiring services to meet five pressing needs: housing, food, mental health, healthy relationships, education, and income. The facilitator instructed staff to use sticky notes provided to draw out their understanding of the fictitious youth's journey within the youth services system. Participants were asked:

- to define the goals of the youth services system as a whole group through a consensus-based activity.
- using sticky notes, to each draw out their own individual map visualizing or outlining the steps taken by the fictitious vulnerable youth to get their needs met from different service providers in Edmonton.
- using their individual maps, to combine them to create a consensus-based group map adequately identifying the common steps taken by the fictitious youth among their individual maps.
- to identify on their group map the emotions they perceive the fictitious youth as experiencing while seeking help in the youth services system (using red sticky notes, draw happy face and/or other facial expressions on red sticky notes along with words to describe the emotion and place on map).
- to identify on their groups map points of uncertainty from the agency point-of-view (using blue sticky notes, draw question marks and place on the map).
- to identify what is working well in the current youth services system based on the illustration reflected in their group map.
- to assess their group map in terms of the picture it illustrates about the youth services system's capacity to achieve the system goals they identified as part of the activities.
- to identify what could be improved in the youth services system.

DrawToast sessions were held in July and September 2019. Various forms of feedback were captured:

- July 18, 2019—collaborative map and group dialogue
  - individual comments
  - creation of group map illustrating the journey of a fictitious youth's experience in the current youth services system
  - facilitated group dialogue
- September 19, 2019 —small group discussion, two tables
  - facilitated dialogue on assessing whether goals of the youth services system were achieved as depicted in their group map
  - small table discussion directed by questions on handout; notetaker appointed at each of two tables to record comments

Method of Analysis

The comments of YACC agencies captured and documented during the engagement activities were combined to facilitate meaningful analysis. The comments and one group map illustrating a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience in the current youth services system were analyzed to look for patterns and emerging themes.

Comments were analyzed using a standard qualitative method called content analysis. Comments were first clustered looking for similar ideas. Then the clusters of comments were analyzed for the purpose of creating a single theme or category that best represented the main idea underlying the clustered comments. The themes developed were also informed by research. The themes emerging from the YACC agencies' comments were cross-referenced with emerging themes in research pertaining to collaborative models for youth services to look for commonalities. This step was done to ensure consistent use of language and useful analysis. Lastly, comments under each theme were counted for frequency.

Comments related to the goals of the youth services system were coded and analyzed separately using a slightly different method. During an engagement activity, YACC agency participants were asked to write one idea per sticky note to identify the goals of the system. Then as a group, they were asked to cluster their comments. Through facilitated dialogue to achieve consensus, themes for each of the clusters were developed by participants. In total, they identified 12 goals of the youth services system.

Considering these 12 goals, YACC agencies were asked to look at the youth services system map they co-created and to assess whether the goals were achieved. Working in small groups at two different tables, YACC agencies were asked to reach consensus about achieving each of the 12 goals using the following five response categories: Yes (confirmatory Yes, the goal was achieved; Yes but… (meaning overall yes, but still room for improvement); Yes and No (meaning it depends on circumstances/other variables); No (confirmatory No, the goal was not achieved); and Other, permitting agencies to create their own response. Using a flipchart listing the 12 goals and the five response categories, participants were asked to identify a response for each of the goals. The facilitator marked an "X" under the appropriate category. Using separate flipchart paper, the facilitator also captured comments related to discussion about each goal. Two sets of responses for each of the 12 goals were combined and analyzed to look for

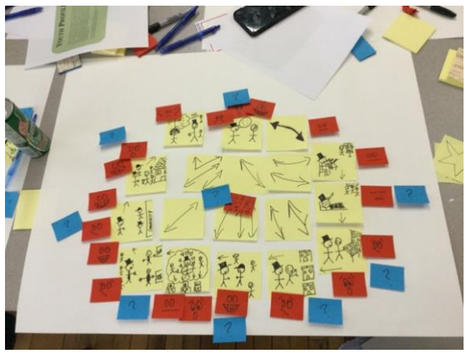
agreement and or disagreement among the responses. Comments from each of the two tables were also analyzed.

Like all qualitative methods, the methods used contain inherent limitations given the subjective nature of them. Themes emerging from comments could not be rigorously tested given the small sample of comments. The themes emerging from the analysis may furthermore be subject to different interpretations.

Findings

Understanding the Vulnerable Youth Experience in the Youth Services System

Figure 1
Individual Map of Youth Services System



Note: This map illustrates one of five individual maps created by YACC agencies that was used to create one group map to depict the youth services system. This map illustrates the "the bouncing ball" effect as a fictitious vulnerable youth seeks help from several agencies.

"Bouncing Ball" Metaphor

During discussion about a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience in the current youth services system, YACC agencies looked at the group map they created as a starting point to share their understanding about the delivery of services. YACC agencies agreed that while the system intends to create a linear experience of services for vulnerable youth, in which youth smoothly and seamlessly go from one agency to another, they believe that this is not the reality youth experience. Some staff described youth as bouncing from agency to agency while seeking help from different agencies, as depicted in Figure 1. YACC agencies agreed that "the bouncing ball metaphor" is a good one to help describe the current experiences of youth in the youth services system. They agreed it was challenging for agencies to adequately adapt and respond to this situation. YACC agencies' comments that emerged during the engagement activity are listed below.

Comments Describing the Vulnerable Youth's Experience in the System

- Difficult
- Confusing
- Colonized
- Inflexible
- Retraumatizing stemming from gaps and non-linear experience of services

Comments Describing Agency Staff Experience in the System

- We are "first responders."
- We are surrogate parents.
- Burned out
- System perpetuates cycle of trauma for youth and staff.

Youth Agency Collaboration Committee Engagement Report

Understanding the Vulnerable Youth Experience (continued)

Conflicting Emotional Experience for Youth

The group map created by YACC agencies illustrates various emotional states experienced by a fictitious vulnerable youth as they seek help in the youth services system. YACC agencies used red sticky notes to draw their perceptions of the emotions experienced by the youth while seeking help in the system as shown in Figure 2. They were asked to used words to describe their drawings. In this way, a picture emerges showing the empathetic awareness YACC agencies possess about the vulnerable youth they are serving.

Figure 2
Youth's Emotions on Red Sticky Notes

This close-up of the group map created during engagement activities illustrates different emotions experienced by a fictitious youth while seeking help from youth serving agencies. The drawings made by YACC agency staff show the youth experiencing conflicting emotions such as excitement, hope, fear, loneliness, skepticism and support.

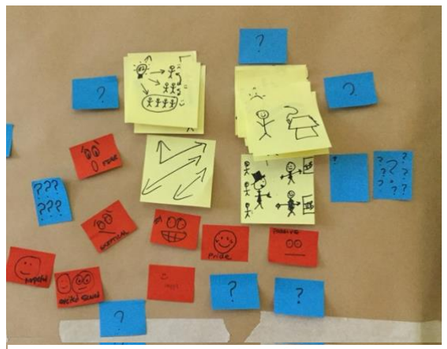
A total of 61 emotions were identified by YACC agencies. Their group map illustrates the fictitious vulnerable youth as increasingly experiencing more positive emotions as they receive services within the system. The map shows, for example, the youth entering the system with more negative than positive emotions. When it comes to exiting the system, the youth is depicted as feeling more positive than negative emotions after having received some support. Examples of positive emotions include hopeful, happy, and supported.

Overall, however, the map depicts the vulnerable youth as experiencing more negative (64% of total number of emotions) than positive emotions (30% of total number of emotions). Examples of negative emotions include sad, confused, frustrated and angry. Another consistent pattern also emerges. The youth is shown as experiencing conflicting emotions throughout the entire experience seeking help within the youth services system. YACC agencies' drawings show the youth experiencing both positive and negative emotions at the same time. A complete list of all emotions identified by agency staff is included at the end of this report.

Uncertainty Is Everywhere in the System

Looking at their group map illustrating the experience of a fictitious vulnerable youth in the youth services system, YACC agencies identified uncertainty throughout youth's entire journey in the system. They did this using blue sticky notes with question marks drawn on them as illustrated in Figure 3. These points of uncertainty suggest there are a lot of unknowns within the system, according to YACC agencies. Most of the uncertainty the agencies identified correspond to the beginning of the youth's experience seeking help in the youth services system. Agencies also identified uncertainty as existing for the vulnerable youth at mid-point in the journey despite already having received services and support. At the end of the youth's journey, points of uncertainty were also identified on the group map, but they were considerably fewer in number. This part of the group map represents the youth exiting the youth services system and indicates some progress has been made as depicted in Figure 3 with red sticky notes identifying positive emotions experienced by the vulnerable youth. However, the map also depicts uncertainty at the end of the youth's journey with several question marks on blue sticky notes. This illustration suggests there is more work to be done to help ensure more certainty in working towards achieving positive outcomes for the vulnerable youth. YACC agencies discussed these findings including their concerns about the impacts of uncertainty. Their comments are listed below as well as the themes summarizing their comments related to concerns.

Figure 3
Uncertainty on Blue Sticky Notes



This image illustrates a portion of the group map created by YACC agencies. It represents the end of a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience in the youth services system. Agencies used blue sticky notes with question marks to indicate points of uncertainty. Even at the end of the youth's journey, uncertainty is indicated as existing.

Comments Related to Uncertainty

- Uncertainty prevalent in all areas of access
- Everything feels unsafe
- No cohesion
- Our biases create differences & conflict
- Agencies–We are all using different models, different data, and measurements, and different language.
- Government-It changes every four years, affects larger services.

Themes Related to Concerns about Uncertainty

- System is inflexible
- System is inefficient and ineffective
- System is set up to help only certain types of youth
- System retraumatizes
- High societal cost
- Creates barriers for achieving success
- Results in lack of confidence in system

Goals of the Youth Services System

During engagement activities, YACC agencies identified 12 goals of the youth services system as it related to vulnerable youth. Their comments related to the goals are summarized at the end of this report. Agencies agreed that feedback from vulnerable youth is further needed to adequately identify the goals of the youth services system.

The 12 goals identified by YACC agencies fall into three different categories:
1) goals that apply to the system as a whole.
2) goals that apply to agencies.
3) goals that apply to youth.

Twelve Goals Identified by YACC

System and Agency Goals

Best Practices
- **Agency Collaboration**
- **Accessible Services**
- **Flexible Services**
- **Agency Personnel & Policies**
- **Non-Judgmental Services**

Inclusive Services
Youth-Relevant Services
Client-Directed Services
Financial Sustainability

Total = 9 goals

Youth Goals

Sustainable Independence
Self-Actualization
Community Empowerment

Total = 3 goals

System Goals

System goals are defined as goals which collectively, all youth serving agencies are striving towards as part of the system to help vulnerable youth with the provision of specific programs and services. Vulnerable youth often seek services from different agencies. In this way, they experience a combination of services offered in the youth services system. At a system level, ideally these combined services provided by agencies help vulnerable youth move towards improved outcomes.

Agency Goals

Agency goals can be defined as goals which each agency within the youth services system strives to achieve for itself in accordance with its mission, programs and services. Agencies share common specific goals that they each wish to achieve such as accessible services. Agency goals and system goals are interrelated. Many of the goals agencies are striving to achieve separately play a role in achieving the goals of the larger system. Indeed, many goals are at the same time both system and agency goals such as agency collaboration and youth-relevant services, for example. They feed into each other through a cycle of mutually reinforcing effects. This is the nature of systems. The impacts of the actions of the individual

stakeholders within the system effect other stakeholders in the system much like the ripple effect.

Youth Goals

The youth services system at both the system level and agency level strive to achieve outcome goals for vulnerable youth. Youth goals are defined as goals specific to vulnerable youth with the ultimate purpose of improving the health and social well-being of vulnerable youth.

Assessing the Achievement of Goals

As part of the engagement activity, YACC agencies were asked to look at the youth services system map they created as a way to spark conversation about the current system's ability to achieve the 12 goals they identified. They did this in two small working groups and ranked whether the goals were achieved using five response categories:

1. Yes — confirmatory Yes, the goal was achieved
2. Yes but… — meaning overall yes, but still room for improvement
3. Yes and No — meaning it depends on circumstances
4. No — confirmatory No, the goal was not achieved
5. Other — agencies created their own response

The two sets of responses were examined looking for patterns of agreement and disagreement between the two groups of agencies (see pages 17 to 18 for details). The two sets of responses for each of the 12 goals were combined to produce one response for each goal as representing the general assessment for achieving the goal. To do this, the same five ranking categories were used. Comments provided by YACC agencies were also examined to help produce one response per goal.

General Findings

Overall, YACC agencies tend to agree more than disagree when it comes to assessing the achievement of the 12 goals of the youth services system. When they disagreed, meaning one table gave a positive response (Yes or Yes, but) for a goal being achieved while the other table gave a negative response (No or Other, for which "other" meant a more or less negative response), their responses were combined into one category called Yes and No. Yes and No as a category means it depends whether the goal was achieved; sometimes yes, the goal was achieved; other times no, the goal was not achieved because of circumstances.

Table 1 on the following page called Assessment of Achieving Goals of the Youth Services System presents high-level findings for each of the 12 goals identified by YACC agencies. It identifies different types of goals—system, agency and youth goals. It also identifies one of three colours—green, yellow or red— to represent the general (ie. combined) assessment of whether the goal was achieved according to responses provided by YACC agencies. A legend is provided to help understand the findings presented in the table. Interpretation of the table is discussed on page 11.

Table 1
Assessment of Achieving Goals of the Youth Services System

Legend

- Yes— positive review indicating, yes, the goal was achieved.
- It Depends (Yes and No) — a mixed review for achieving a goal, meaning either Yes or No the goal was achieved depending on circumstances.
- No— a negative review indicating, no, the goal was not achieved.

System & Agency Goals	Response
Best Practices	
• Agency Collaboration	
• Accessible Services	
• Flexible Services	
• Agency Personnel & Policies	
• Non-Judgmental Services	
Inclusive Services	
Youth-Relevant Services	
Client-Directed Services	
Financial Sustainability	

Youth Goals	Response
Sustainable Independence	
Self-Actualization	
Community Empowerment	

Note: This table summarizes analysis of the responses provided by YACC agencies during an engagement activity. Sitting at two different tables, agency staff were asked to look at the group map they had created illustrating a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience seeking help in the youth services system. Each table was asked to reach consensus and to answer whether each of the 12 goals had been achieved. The responses of each of the two tables were combined to produce one response for the goals listed in this table. The most frequent response is It Depends (Yes and No), followed by No, and then Yes. Agencies agreed that only one goal—agency collaboration—was achieved.

Achievement of Goals—Discussion

It Depends (Yes and No)—Most Frequent Assessment
Table 1 illustrates some patterns. When considering all 12 goals, overall YACC agencies said "it depends" (Yes and No) when it comes to assessing the achievement of the goals. This is indicated by counting up the number of yellow coloured circles in the table, of which there is eight. The yellow coloured circle indicates that It Depends (both Yes and No) if the goal was achieved. In other words, agencies tended to agreed that yes, most of the goals were achieved to some extent, but also sometimes no, these goals were not achieved because of circumstances. This was true for most of the system and agency goals they identified. This includes the goal theme called best practices, which refers to the following goals: accessible services, flexible services, agency personnel and polices, and non-judgmental services. This was also true for the system and agency goals identified as inclusive services and youth-relevant services. Under youth goals, YACC agencies agreed that the goals of sustainable independence and self-actualization were sometimes achieved for vulnerable youth, while other times they were not.

Examples of Documented Comments:

Accessible Services
- lack of services/many barriers/not meeting youth with where they are at in their journey with recovery and addictions

Flexible Services
- flexible people in the system but the services are not flexible
- reflects flexibility in what we are able to provide, BUT is not ideal

Youth-Relevant Services
- current programs, services privilege a certain type of youth accessing (have inherent supports, funds to access services)

Inclusive Services
- more learning is needed for providers services. We are aware and willing.
- physical inclusivity with entire systen even agencies, are still not inclusive.

Looking at the comments related to these eight goals ranked and It Depends (Yes and No), a main message emerges. YACC agencies agree that while there is some progress in achieving these eight goals, the situation is not ideal requiring more work to make improvements in those areas and to eliminate barriers to accessing services. Comments include that progress has been made to reduce barriers to make services more accessible, and people within the system are flexible. Comments related to improvement shed light on what YACC agencies believe needs to be done to better achieve these eight goals. Improvement often refers to creating consistency in the quality of services across the entire youth services system along with more education and awareness. Improvement also refers to need for more feedback from vulnerable youth to influence the design and delivery of youth services. Barriers to achieving these eight goals include external influences such as funding and professional requirements that limit agencies to do such things as pay and train staff. Other identified barriers include the following: the system is not adequately set up to meet the complex or high needs that many vulnerable youth have, and there are barriers facing vulnerable youth with recovery and addictions.

Comments related to youth goals of self-actualization and sustainable independence reveal that YACC agencies perceive some inherent limitations within the system to help vulnerable youth achieve these goals. Comments include the following: while youth may achieve self-actualization, they are still fragile when exiting the youth services system; there are inadequate resources such as time or intentional programming to help youth achieve self-actualization and sustainable independence. Other comments reveal that assessing the achievement of youth goals is challenging and complex. For example, sustainable independence was identified as being subjective and complex to assess as well as being inherently linked with the achievement of self-actualization as a goal.

No—Some Goals Aren't Being Achieved
Another pattern also emerges when looking at Table 1. YACC agencies resoundingly agreed on what goals are not being achieved. The table identifies a total of three goals (identified with red coloured circles) out of 12 as not being achieved. YACC agencies agreed that the system and agency goals called client-directed services and financial sustainability were not achieved. Comments include that while some agencies are starting to move towards client-directed services, client-directed services as a concept has been a buzzword. Comments about financial sustainability reveal differences in opinion over what this goal refers to. Some agencies interpreted financial sustainability as referring to vulnerable youth while others interpreted it as referring to the financial sustainability of agencies. Nevertheless, comments reveal that this goal is not being achieved for both vulnerable youth and agencies. Some agencies said lack of consistent government funding results in creating challenges for agencies to achieve financial sustainability. Further discussion would be required to better understand this goal.

Examples of Documented Comments:

Financial Sustainability
- Without influx of capital and support With a relational build up in network, it Is unlikely the youth will ever be Sustainable.
- Map shows the system as it is funded. But funding can change/is inconsistent, Is an issue.

Community empowerment
- There is some but it is inconsistent.
- System discriminates against Symptoms of trauma and different Demographics of youth.

YACC agencies also agreed that the youth goal of community empowerment was not achieved. Some agencies said there is some success but it is inconsistent. Others said the system discriminates against vulnerable youth with symptoms of trauma and against youth of different demographics.

Yes—One Goal is Being Achieved But…
Lastly, Table 1 shows that YACC agencies agreed that one goal is being achieved. It's the system and agency goal called agency collaboration. Agencies said they are trying to collaborate; however, they face significant barriers to collaboration. The biggest barrier identified is funding. Comments include that funding requirements pit agencies against each other "to compete for limited dollars." This built-in competition makes it difficult because while on the one hand agencies are trying to collaborate, on the other hand and at the same time they must ensure their own self-preservation to obtain funding dollars to continue to provide their services and programming for vulnerable youth. Agency comments highlight the urgent need of changing this funding conundrum. Other comments reveal another side to collaboration: agencies need to be willing to take more risks to act on new ideas.

Examples of Documented Comments:

Agency Collaboration
- Agencies try to be collaborative but it is difficult as funding requires for them to compete for limited dollars
- They have been set up to compete for same dollars. This needs to change.
- Agencies can't always be honest about the problems and need to play politics.
- Agencies need to take back control to tell funders what needs to be funded rather than the other way around.
- Non-profits also need to be less risk averse when working in this field and take more chances on new ideas.

What's Working Well

The following themes were developed based on the comments made by YACC Agencies about what they perceive as currently working well in the youth services System to meet the needs of vulnerable youth. A complete list of all comments and themes are included at the end of this report.

Themes

*Listed in descending order based on frequency of comments. The top theme is indicated in **bold text**. The remaining themes are considerably lower in frequency of comments made by agencies.*

1. **Essential System Infrastructure Components**
2. Increased Quality of Services
3. Good Staff
4. Collaboration
5. Shared Understandings
6. Commitment to Best Practices in Care
7. Increased Attention to Youth Issues
8. Community Support

Examples of Verbatim Comments

Essential System Infrastructure Components

- Variety of youth serving agencies/ offer diverse services
- Welcoming entry
- There is success for some
- Understand the need
- Intake

Increased Quality of Services

- Links and other internal mental health supports
- Transitional housing

What's Working Well—Discussion

YACC agencies agreed overwhelmingly that there one main thing currently working well in the youth services system: the existence of essential infrastructure components (x19 comments). The theme infrastructure refers to the types of things that support and enable the existence of the youth services system such as services, administrative processes and operating procedures. Agencies said the following things related to infrastructure are working well: diverse plentiful services, a welcoming entry into the system, healthy demand for youth services, understanding of vulnerable youth's needs, and some good service navigation.

Following this, agencies' comments on what's working well were clustered into three themes: increased quality of services (x6 comments), good staff (x6 comments), and collaboration (x6 comments). Under the theme of increased quality of services, agencies identified better mental health support services and transitional housing as working well. When it comes to good staff, agencies agree there are good compassionate people offering services to vulnerable youth and they are listening to the lived experiences of vulnerable youth. Their comments about collaboration highlight positive gains. Agencies said there is a desire and intent to collaborate, and agencies have made progress building relationships and working "in solidarity much more over the past years."

Following these, the remaining themes emerged for what's working well: shared understandings (x5 comments), commitment to best practices (x4 comments), and community support (x2 comments), and increased attention to growing issues facing vulnerable youth (x2 comments). Comments related to the theme of shared understandings highlight commonly held perspectives among YACC agencies. They include a desire to change and support innovation in service delivery, as well as a good level of understanding about barriers in the system. Under the theme commitment to best practices, agencies said there is commitment or growing interest in the practice of trauma-informed care as well as harm reduction and therapeutic crisis intervention. The theme community support includes agencies' comments about the community at large. Agencies said while the community is open and caring, there still exists a "NIMBY" attitude (not in my backyard) within the community. Under the theme increased attention to growing issues facing vulnerable youth, agencies commented on progress at the local and national levels. Locally, agencies said they are doing more to address the need for mental health resources. Other agency staff said that at a national level, more attention is being paid to youth homelessness and youth trauma.

What Could Be Improved

The following themes were developed based on the comments made by YACC agencies about what they perceive could be improved in the youth services system as it relates to vulnerable youth. A complete list of all comments and themes are included at the end of this report.

Themes for Areas of Improvement

Listed in descending order of importance. The top four themes are indicated in **bold text**. The remaining themes are considerably lower in frequency of comments made by agencies.*

1. **Coordinated Access and Infrastructure**
2. **Youth Care Practices**
3. **Funding**
4. **Collaboration & Communication**
5. Community Engagement
6. Quality of Mental Health & Housing Services
7. Youth Engagement
8. Agency Empowerment to Influence System
9. Commitment to Solutions
10. Barriers
11. Agency Effectiveness
12. Evaluation

Examples of Verbatim Comments

Coordinated Access & Infrastructure

- Coordinated access
- Not needing to retell story
- Service coordination
- Access to all for all
- Geographical coverage
- Access and hours of coverage service
- Consistency of system
- Consistency of metrics
- Consistency in training

Youth Care Practices

- Prevention-focused services
- Family reconnection focus
- Trauma support
- Increased access to post-trauma services
- Addiction services
- Staff training

**Importance was determined mainly by frequency count of comments corresponding to each theme. Coordinated access and infrastructure is close in frequency count to youth care practices but was identified as the top theme upon closer review of the comments. Comments related to coordinated access contain more consistency in the terms used than do comments related to youth care practices, which contain more diversity. Moreover, in the research, coordinated access and infrastructure are identified as enabling coordinated care practices.*

What Could Be Improved—Discussion

When it comes to what could be improved in helping vulnerable youth withsin the youth services system, four main themes emerged from agencies' comments. They are: 1) coordinated access and infrastructure 2) youth care practices, 3) funding, and 4) collaboration and communication. They will be addressed here. Details addressing the remaining themes and comments associated with them, including youth engagement, barriers and evaluation, can be found at the end of this report.

Agencies' comments related to the themes of coordinated access and infrastructure along with the theme of youth care practices were the most frequent ones out of all comments captured during engagement activities focussed on identifying areas for improvement within the youth services system. Agencies' comments about coordinated access and infrastructure were the most consistent and therefore ranked as the number one theme for what could be improved. Their comments reveal several ideas are interrelated to coordinated access. Agencies said coordination includes coordination of services, geographical coverage, and hours of services made available to vulnerable youth. Other comments identify the need for consistency across the youth services system when it comes to metrics used to evaluate services, language used by different agencies, and training. Such things are referred to as shared infrastructure in the research conducted to write the literature review for the YAC project.[1]

Agencies' comments pertaining to the theme of youth care practices highlight common areas of interest. Agencies agree that more work needs to be done in prevention care along with care provided to vulnerable youth when they exit the system, which was referred to as increased access to post-trauma services. Other comments highlight the need for more focus on trauma support, family reconnection services, addiction services, and more staff training.

Besides these main themes, agencies also identified funding as top area in need of improvement. Agencies said not only is better funding needed, but also the entire funding system needs to improve. They said any improvements must be driven by agencies in order to make the right improvements. Agencies said, for example, different types of funding are needed to better support the work of non-profits (eg. multi-year, block, trauma-informed funding).

The last of the top main themes is collaboration and communication. Agencies said while collaboration already exists, it could be better. They said collaboration needs to be more streamlined and strategic, for example, and it needs to eliminate the competition that exists among agencies. During discussions, agencies said competition is a consequence of the current funding system, which ends up pitting agencies against each other for access to limited dollars. Better communication among agencies also emerged as being closely connected to the need for improved collaboration.

[1] See the literature review included in the appendices of this report. The scholarly article written by Settipani et al. (2019) called *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health* provides a good place to start for understanding common principles to guide collaborative youth service models. Coordinated infrastructure and care are common approaches used in several youth projects across the world, which were examined in the research.

Raw Comments and Themes Emerging from Engagement Activities

Goals of the Youth Services System—Raw Comments and Themes

**Themes developed by YACC agencies through consensus*

Theme	Comments	Goal Achieved?	
		Table 1	Table 2
Self-Actualization	• Help stabilize young people on their terms • Help young people see/appreciate their capacity potential • Self-actualization (self-esteem, self-discipline and control, emotional regulation)	Yes & No	Yes but
Sustainable Independence	• Sustainable independence (income, housing) • Address real needs with sustainable solutions	Yes & No	Yes & No
Youth Relevant	• Relevant (to youth)	Yes & No	Yes & No
Financial Sustainability	• Sustainable agency funding • Fully financed	No	No
Inclusive Services	• Accepted and respected in community • Create an inclusive and safe system of support • Queer community (eg. Practice and policy) • Appropriate referrals	Yes & No	Yes but
Community Empowerment	• Supporting the education and employment of youth • Learning opportunities for youth to better understand their rights • Empower youth to speak /advocate for needs • Young people are equitable members of society • Appropriate activities that engage • Community empowerment	No	No but

Theme	Comments	Goal Achieved?	
		Table 1	Table 2
Best Practice/ Excellence Approach			
Agency Personnel and Policies	• Better case workers (understand youth) • Well trained, well paid staff • Policy changes (simple language) and learning opportunities • Transparency • Accountability • Evidence-based approach	Yes & No	Other
Accessible Services	• Better access for young people to services • Access • Accessible • Provide access to harm reduction resources/services where, when, and with competence and compassion	Yes & No	Yes & No
Flexible Services	Theme developed by consensus	No	Yes but
Non-Judgmental	• Move away from punishment-based approaches • To not be punitive, antiquated and cyclical	No	Yes
Agency Collaboration	• Open collaboration • Connect, consult, collaborate • Collaborative	Yes but	Yes
Other	• Thorough/fulsome • Responsive versus reactive • Housing (direct) with proper support (counsellor) • One definition of youth for all system	N/A	

YACC Agencies' Perceptions of Emotional Experiences of Youth—Raw Comments

Part of Journey on Group Map of Youth Services System	Negative Emotions Experienced	Positive Emotions Experienced	Neutral Emotions	Other
Entering System **X19 emotions**	• only me • scared • sad • angry • sad • anger/fear • frustration • sadness • uncertain • sad • annoyed • skeptical • sad • confused • sad	• witnessed • hopeful • happy		all emotions
Next steps (Middle of map) **X33 emotions**	• sad • stress • confused • sad • confused • sad • frustrated • angry • frustration • discouraged • pissy • sad • angry • frustrated • confused • depressed • discouraged • scared • skeptical • lonely • fear	• hopeful • happy • hopeful • happy • happy • hopeful • excited • supported • empowered • hopeful	• flat • passive	
Exiting System **X9 emotions**	• scared • skeptical • fear	• hopeful • excited • joy • happy • pride	• passive	

Understanding of Uncertainty Within Youth the Services System

Looking at the group map they created to illustrate a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience in the youth services system, YACC agencies worked in two small groups at tables to discuss uncertainty within the system. They captured their feedback in writing. The table below presents their comments.

What does the map show about uncertainty in the youth services system?	
Table 1 Comments	**Table 2 Comments**
• Uncertainty prevalent in all areas of access	• There is no certainty. • Everything feels unsafe. • "No one stays in our lives."- youth • No cohesion. • Agencies—We are all using different models, different data, and measurements, and different language. • Our biases create differences and conflict. • Advocacy versus compassion. • Government—It changes every four years. Affects larger services.
Is this a concern? Why or why not	
Table 1 Comments	**Table 2 Comments**
• Yes, it is a concern • Inherent to how systems are set up, assume privilege • Service providers (once experienced with system) "take for granted" that there will be barriers, uncertainty, inconsistencies throughout the system • Concern to the amount of energy and effort to move forward by both service providers and young people • Service providers have no confidence in any processes of systems • System don't fit realities. • Systems can't accommodate inconsistencies ins service users	• Yes, this is a concern because: • Inefficient • Not meeting where they (Youth) are at • Retraumatizing • Continues the cycle • Results in high societal cost

What's Working Well — Raw Comments and Themes

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments (July)	Facilitated Dialogue (July)	Table Discussion (September)
Essential System Infrastructure Components x19	☐ The system exists for youth ☐ Persistence ☐ Welcoming entry ☐ Options ☐ Lots of resources ☐ There is success for some ☐ Understand the need ☐ Intake	☐ Services currently available ☐ Variety of youth serving agencies/offer diverse services ☐ What we offer is worthy ☐ There is some good navigation in the system ☐ There is a high need for services (so why the competition?) ☐ Hope for youth in the future ☐ We have success stories of youth (Hope)	☐ Lots of resources that want to work with young people ☐ There is at least a basic system in place ☐ Youth are asking for help ☐ We are getting better at navigation
Good Staff x6	☐ good people within the system ☐ willingness to help ☐ there are lots of people who care ☐ compassion ☐ consistent compassion	☐ Good caring people in the system	
Increased Quality of Services x6	☐ Work mentorship programs ☐ transitional housing ☐ programs focused on self ☐ links and other internal mental health supports		☐ We are better now at meeting them (youth) Where they are at ☐ We are listening to live experience
Collaboration x6	☐ Collaboration ☐ Youth Agency Collaboration	☐ Intent to communicate and collaborate	☐ service providers have a want to collaborate. ☐ Some individuals in systems are community minded, & collaborative (Edmonton Police Services, Alberta Health Services, Children Services) service providers (agencies) have been building relationships and working in solidarity much more over the past years.
Shared Understandings x5		☐ Awareness of the need to improve ☐ Desire to change	☐ service providers have a good level of understanding to what barriers present ☐ Communities (service providers) support innovation in provision of services. ☐ Shared common context, frame of reference and terminology (as well as explanation of frustration)
Commitment to Best Practices in Care x4	☐ There is common practice ☐ Trauma-informed care and Therapeutic Crisis intervention		☐ some individuals in system are trauma informed ☐ Agency passion and commitment to: no judgment, harm reduction, trauma informed and TCI, dignity
Community Support x2			☐ Communities (larger) are more accepting and involved in agencies. ☐ Community is open and caring (as long as its NIMBY, Not in my backyard)
Increased attention to growing youth issues (mental health and homelessness) x2		☐ Individual agencies recognize the need for mental health resources and are doing something about it ☐ More attention on youth issues with post-secondary institutions and national policy makers trying to influence youth homelessness and youth trauma	☐ We have a national advocacy policy for youth homelessness

What Could Be Improved—Raw Comments and Themes

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments (July)	Facilitated Dialogue (July)	Table Discussion (September)
Youth Care Practices x16	• Prevention care (prior to entry into system) • Focus on family reconnect • Addiction services • Trauma support • Trauma training and ed • Staff training	• Increased knowledge of post-trauma services • Increased access to post-trauma services • Prevention-focused services • family reconnection focus • Harm reduction focus needed to shape policy	• Parenting focus • Healing • Self-actualization • Time, and intentionality and staff (training) • They (youth) need to be Treated with dignity
Coordinated Infrastructure and Access x14	• Coordinated access • Access to services (coordination) • Not needing to retell story • Service coordination • Access to all for all • Geographical coverage • Access and hours of coverage service • Access to services	• intake	• Consistency of Organization and staff, • Consistency of system • Consistency of metrics • Consistency of language • Consistency in training
Funding x13	• Funding • Funding for agencies • Funding • Funding • Better funding needed	• Funding • Agencies need to play the key role in defining what they hope to achieve and not funders	• Funders trust that organizations can use funds appropriately without binding outcomes. • Funders and the funding system need improvement • Multi-year funding • Funding that is trauma informed • Block funding • Take direction from experts
Collaboration & Communication x10	☐ Collaboration	☐ Communication and collaboration	☐ System trust service providers to know how to best support individuals ☐ Better Communication as to how policies need to work to make both systems and service providers happy ☐ Collaboration streamlined ☐ Collaboration: we need to be vulnerable ☐ Our collaboration needs improvement: ☐ Remove egos, Be vulnerable ☐ Not compete ☐ Be strategic
Community Engagement x8	☐ Community engagement ☐ Community approach Community engagement and connection		☐ Community integration (Intentional) ☐ Living spaces (ie North Star) ☐ Activities ☐ Social ventures ☐ Mentorship
Quality of Services X6	☐ Mental health access ☐ Mental health support ☐ Supportive housing ☐ Better housing options ☐ Separate youth homelessness from adult	☐ Better meet high demand/needs for services	

What Could Be Improved – Raw Comments and Themes continued

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments (July)	Facilitated Dialogue (July)	Table Discussion (September)
Youth Engagement x5	• Inclusion of youth solutions in Systems		• Positive peer support • youth input • Youth leadership • Youth-driven/Informed
Agency Empowerment to Influence System X4		• Determine what needs to be achieved should be client-informed process • Strategy is needed to influence policy/funding for youth services	• Give power to the "Ball Busters" (Ball busters defined as: bouncing balls metaphor, those people that on both sides of busting their butts but limited by power/barriers/policy /etc.) • Policy making with knowledge of experience from frontlines (exchange /cross training)
Commitment to Solutions x5	• Commitment to solutions • Commitment • Full government support for solutions	• Commitment from higher up to solutions for system	• Consistency of Government
Barriers x5	• Decolonization • System barriers (racism, discrimination, inefficiencies) • Inflexibility • Remove competition	• Eliminate competition among Agencies	
Agency Effectiveness x4	☐ Policy ☐ Best practices ☐ Accountability of agencies and services ☐ Transparency		
Evaluation x3		☐ Define the goals/success of the system (what are we trying to achieve?) ☐ Determine when it is OK for youth to Exit the system	☐ System designed to support a "society", difficult to break down to work with individuals.

Group Map Illustration—Vulnerable Youth's Experience in Youth Services System

The following map was produced by YACC agencies using a collaborative visualization engagement activity. It illustrates a fictitious vulnerable youth's experience in the youth services system. The vulnerable youth is seeking help to meet the following five needs: housing, food, mental health, healthy relationships, education, and income. The images below show the entire map along with close-ups of it. YACC agencies used red sticky notes to identify emotions experienced by the youth. They used blue stick notes with question marks written on them to identify anything they perceived as being uncertain.

Appendix B

Youth Engagement Report
Youth Agency Collaboration

What Vulnerable Youth Told Us
2019

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Engagement Details

Between October and December 2019, interviews with vulnerable youth were conducted as part of the Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) project. A questionnaire was developed incorporating feedback from YAC agencies on questions to ask of youth who have used or are using their services. In total, 12 vulnerable youth were selected for interviews after working closely with YAC agencies. Efforts were made to obtain as diverse and representative a sample as possible given the challenges of interviewing youth from vulnerable populations. The following criteria were created to guide the selection of youth:

- vulnerable youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age
- vulnerable youth with lived experience who are currently in a stable condition
- diversity in demographic traits:
    - sex (male, female, intersex or X)
    - gender and sexual orientation
    - ethnicity, with proactive efforts to seek participation of Indigenous youth
- vulnerable youth with experience of homelessness and mental health

At the end of the interview, youth were informed that they would be given food gift cards as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Method of Analysis

Interviews with the vulnerable youth were captured using audio recorder. The recordings were transcribed, producing 12 transcripts in total. Comments in each interview were selected for the purpose of analyzing feedback from youth. Many youth talked off topic or repeated themselves during the interviews. Only comments deemed as being relevant responses the questions in the questionnaire were included for analysis. Not all comments were used as a result.

Selected comments were analyzed using a standard qualitative method called content analysis. Comments were clustered looking for similar ideas. Then the clusters of comments were analyzed for the purpose of creating a single theme or category that best represented the main idea underlying the clustered comments. Comments corresponding to each theme were counted for frequency. The themes were developed by cross-referencing them with themes that emerged during analysis of feedback from YAC agencies, which was obtained through engagement activities. When a theme was relevant and appropriate, it was used to summarize comments made by youth. This step was done to ensure consistent use of themes when applicable and for comparative analysis.

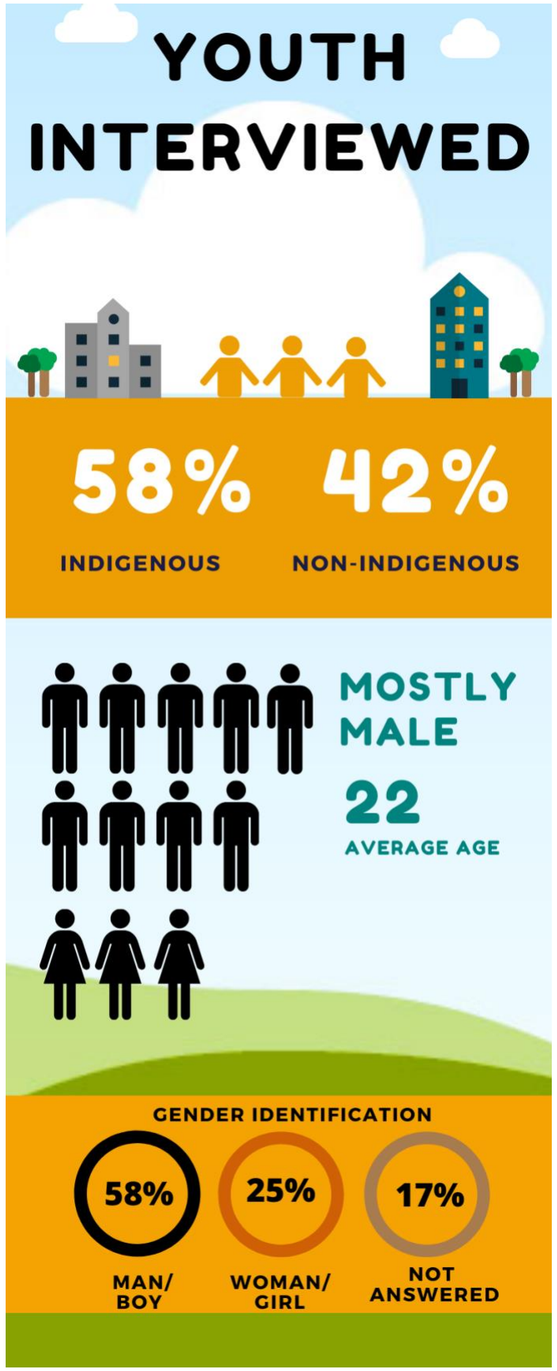
Like all qualitative methods, the methods used contain inherent limitations given the subjective nature of them. Themes emerging from comments could not be rigorously tested given the small sample of comments. The themes emerging from the analysis may furthermore be subject to different interpretations.

Youth Demographics

A total of 12 vulnerable youth between the ages of 16 and 29 was interviewed. Their average age is 22. More than half (58%) were Indigenous and most youth identified as being of the male sex (75%). All youth who identified as being of the female sex (25%) also identified as being Indigenous.

Out of the seven Indigenous youth, they identified themselves as First Nations and Métis. Out of the five Non-Indigenous youth, they identified as Canadian, European, Asian, and one as Haitian.

Vulnerable youth were asked about their gender identification as well. Using the City of Edmonton's gender categories in the 2019 Census, a total of eight response categories were provided as part of an exit survey. They are: man/boy, woman/girl, transman, transwoman, two spirit, non-binary, identified as other gender, and prefer not to answer. Ten of 12 vulnerable youth responded to the question; two youth did not answer it. The majority of youth identified using traditional gender categories: 58 per cent identified as man/boy and 25 per cent as woman/girl.



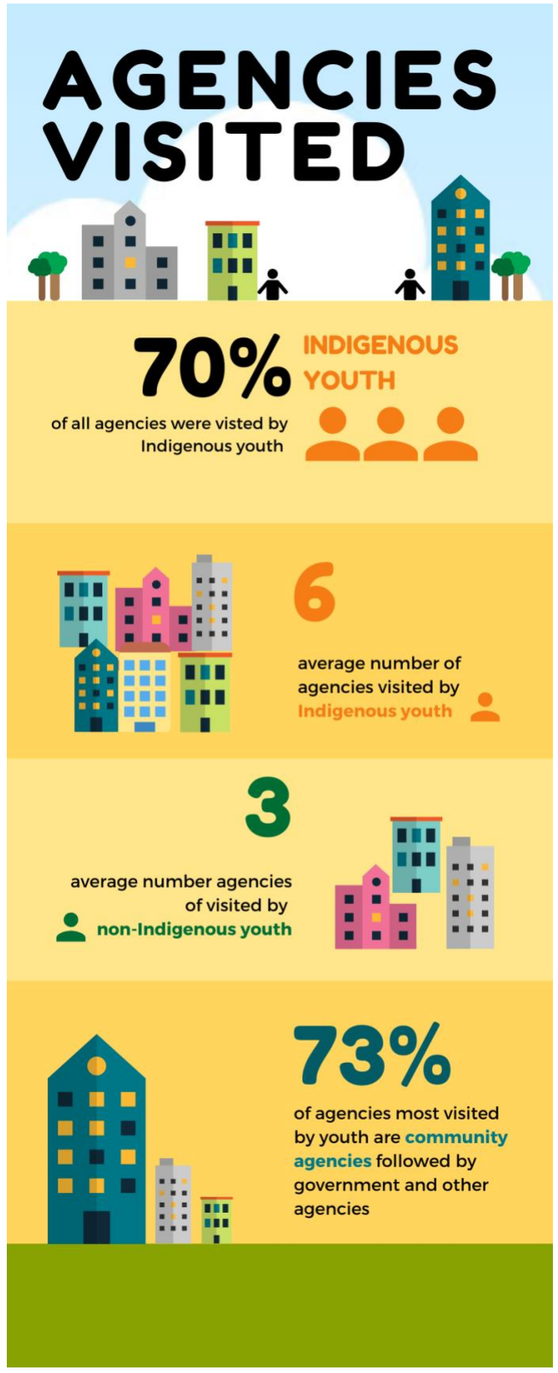
Vulnerable Youth Experience in the Youth Services System

When it comes to the experience of using youth services, the ethnicity of vulnerable youth plays a role in shaping that experience. Data gathered show that most of the agencies visited were visited by Indigenous youth (70% of all visits) compared to non-Indigenous youth (30% of all visits), and they are disproportionately represented. While Indigenous youth make up slightly more (58%) than non-Indigenous youth (42%) in the sample of youth interviewed, Indigenous youth are disproportionately represented even when accounting for this fact.

This pattern continues to emerge when looking closer at the data. Indigenous youth are visiting almost twice as many agencies (5.5 rounded up to 6 agencies) as non-Indigenous youth (3.4 rounded to 3) to have their needs met.

The pattern also applies when looking at the types of agencies that vulnerable youth are visiting for services. Data show that Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth tend to visit mostly non-profit community agencies (73% of all agencies visited) followed by government agencies (18%) and then other agencies (9%), which includes schools and private agencies. Indigenous youth are disproportionately represented, especially in visits to community (71%) and government (70%) agencies.

Data furthermore show a slight difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in terms of the types of agencies they first turn to for help when entering the youth services system. Non-indigenous youth tend to have a consistent pattern of first accessing services through Nexus (community agency) as their portal into the youth services system followed by other agencies. Indigenous youth, however, do not have a consistent pattern when it comes to entering the youth services system. They tend to first



turn to a variety of community agencies for help including Nexus but not solely Nexus, then to government services followed by other agencies.

Emotional Experiences of Youth

Vulnerable youth identified a total of 59 different emotions to describe the feelings that they experienced as they sought help from youth serving agencies. Responses to questions about their emotional experiences were somewhat challenging to analyze. A couple of youth struggled to articulate their emotional experiences, for example. Furthermore, attempts to accurately capture the emotional experiences of vulnerable youth upon their entry into the system through to exiting the system were challenging, especially near the end of their journey in the system. The data captured upon exiting the system were not as complete as other data related to youth's experiences. Nevertheless, the findings help provide insight.

Overall, vulnerable youth said they experienced far more negative emotions (61% of all emotions) than positive ones (39%) while seeking help from agencies, and they often experienced both negative and positive emotions at the same time. Youth often reported feeling negative emotions such as depressed and hopeless in relation to their circumstances, some of which included trauma and addictions as it pertained to themselves or to people with whom they had romantic relationships. While the data were somewhat incomplete, the data show that after vulnerable youth entered the youth services system, they began to experience a decrease in negative emotions and an increase in positive emotions as they continued to seek services to meet their needs. However, youth reported experiencing the most negative emotions upon exiting the youth services system (75%) and the fewest positive emotions (25%). Examples of negative emotions include defeated, unvalued, traumatized and conflicted; positive emotions included joyful and positive.

Despite these findings, overall, vulnerable youth reported that their interactions with agency staff had positive impacts on their emotional well-being. One youth reported, for example, "They help you. Makes me feel good. Like, they can connect to your problems and stuff." Another one said: "It was very positive direction. She was very understanding, she's very relatable. And I'd say it had a positive effect on my emotional well-being." However, upon further analysis of the feedback, the data once again reflect some differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth were more likely to report negative impacts on their emotional well-being stemming from interactions with staff than did non-Indigenous youth.

Youth Comments on Safety

- "There's a lot of kids that come that are either doing meth or drunk, and they steal your stuff. They threaten you and it's just not the best."
- "Sometimes I felt unsafe because of the people that were there and some of the fights…"

Youth Perceptions on Safety While at Agencies

Vulnerable youth interviewed were almost split 50/50 when asked if they felt safe while visiting agencies for services. Some said yes, they feel safe, while others said no, they don't feel safe. Further analysis shows, however, that Indigenous youth reported feeling unsafe more so than non-Indigenous youth. Of these Indigenous youth, they reported feeling unsafe related either to the location of the agency or to violence among other youth at the agency. Non-Indigenous youth who reported feeling unsafe shared the same concerns.

Youth Perceptions on Helpfulness of Services

Vulnerable youth were asked to rate the helpfulness of the services they received. They were encouraged to think of a response using a five-point Likert scale of very helpful to not helpful. Their responses were coded using the scale in the table below. Looking at the comments made by all vulnerable youth, a majority of youth (58%) said the services they received were very helpful or helpful to them. On the other hand, 42 per cent gave less positive rankings, saying the services they received were somewhat helpful, somewhat unhelpful or not helpful.

However, upon further investigation, differences in opinion emerge when comparing responses between vulnerable non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth. All non-Indigenous youth (100%) tended to give the most positive reviews, saying services were very helpful or helpful. Indigenous youth, however, were somewhat split in their opinions and less willing to give positive reviews. A total of 43 per cent of Indigenous youth said the services they received were helpful or very helpful. On the other hand, 57 per cent gave less positive reviews, saying the services they received were somewhat helpful, somewhat unhelpful and not helpful at all.

Two main themes emerged when vulnerable youth were further asked what was most helpful to them. Youth agreed that youth care practices and access to services were the most helpful, followed next by good staff. Their comments about youth care practices highlight the benefits of youth workers. The workers help vulnerable youth access services, therapy, and personalized care, and the provide general compassion. Comments related to access to services show that vulnerable youth value access to housing, pregnancy and baby care, and employment services. A youth's comment highlights better coordination of access to services as being helpful: "Yeah, it can be beneficial as long as it's not like a loop that leaves you pushing you from people and place to place without having anything to provide." A few youth also commented on good staff as being helpful. They said the staff's enthusiasm and ability to understand youth's circumstances helped them.

Top Themes: What Was Most Helpful to Vulnerable Youth

1. Youth Care Practices
2. Access to Services
3. Good Staff

Thinking of your entire experience seeking support from agencies, how helpful were the services you received from the agencies that you visited? N=12			
Ranking	**Total Count**	**Number of Indigenous Youth**	**Number of Non-Indigenous Youth**
Very Helpful	4	1	3
Helpful	3	2	1
Somewhat Helpful	3	2	1
Somewhat Unhelpful	1	1	0
Not Helpful	1	1	0
TOTAL	12	7	5

Youth Opinions on Ability of Youth Services System to Meet Their Needs

During interviews, vulnerable youth were asked to describe the ability of the youth services system, in general, to meet their needs. They were encouraged to think of describing their opinion in terms of the effectiveness of the system to meet their needs. Their responses were coded using a five-point Likert scale from very effective to not effective. While the nature of the question is broad and challenging given that most vulnerable youth received services from more than one agency, their comments provide some indication of youth's satisfaction with services.

Looking at responses of all vulnerable youth, most youth (58%) said the system as a whole ranged from being effective to very effective in meeting their needs. Twenty-five per cent of youth interviewed were less positive, saying the system was either somewhat effective to not effective. Two youth did not directly answer the question.

However, when comparing responses between vulnerable non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth, we see differences in opinions. All the non-Indigenous youth (100%) gave the most positive reviews (effective to very effective) for the system's ability to meet their needs whereas all the less positive reviews were made by Indigenous youth only. Most Indigenous youth (43%) said the system was either somewhat effective or not effective for meeting their needs; only two Indigenous youth (29%) said the system was effective in meeting their needs. Looking at the comments made by two Indigenous youth that were coded Not Answered, those comments contain a more critical tone of the system.

How would you describe the youth services system's ability to meet your needs? N=12			
Ranking	**Total Count**	**Number of Indigenous Youth**	**Number of Non-Indigenous Youth**
Very Effective	3	0	3
Effective	4	2	2
Somewhat Effective	2	2	0
Somewhat Ineffective	0	0	0
Not Effective	1	1	0
Not Answered	2	2	0
TOTAL	12	7	5

Youth Attitudes Towards Information Sharing

Overall, the majority of vulnerable youth (75%) reported that they did not have concerns about sharing their personal information with agencies as part of the process of accessing services. Upon closer inspection of youth's responses, however, the data show that differences in attitudes exist between vulnerable Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. All non-Indigenous youth (100%) in the sample reported that they did not have concerns about sharing their personal information. Only 57 per cent Indigenous youth, on the other hand, said they had no concerns. The two youth who reported having concerns about sharing their information were both Indigenous youth (29% of all Indigenous youth). This finding further supports the existence of differences between the two youth populations within the sample of youth interviewed.

Feelings about Sharing Information: Comments Made by Indigenous Youth

"So, I thought that my rights were kind of looked over."

"Just share with the whole world. Give it to whoever you want. I don't care because they're just going to all the cops."

"It's a lot to handle, and it can be a little too much sometimes, what they do."

Youth's comments related to their feelings about sharing personal information may help better understand differences in attitudes between vulnerable Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. The table below summarizes the findings. All negative feelings about sharing information were made by Indigenous youth whereas non-Indigenous youth's comments about their feelings tended to be neutral or positive. A review of the comments indicates that some Indigenous youth lack trust in the process. Two youth, for example, reported negative experiences sharing information. One youth said their rights were overlooked while the other youth shared a story, saying agency staff accused them of lying and ultimately concluded that staff had been discriminatory against them. Another Indigenous youth's comments suggest the youth felt defeated about sharing information. The youth said: "I don't care. They're just going to call the cops." In contrast, non-Indigenous youth's comments indicate more trust in the process. One youth said, for example, "I was ok with it because I knew they weren't going to give it out." Another one said:" I think it was good. It was always behind closed doors, so I always trust them. Information has stayed at that or has been destroyed. It's never been a problem."

How did you feel about sharing your personal information? N=12 youth			
Comments	**Total Count**	**Number of Indigenous Youth**	**Number of Non-Indigenous Youth**
Negative	4	4	0
Positive	3	1	2
Neutral	3	0	3
Not Answered	2	2	0
TOTAL	12	7	5

What's Working Well

The following themes were developed based on the comments made by vulnerable youth about what they perceive as currently working well in the youth services system. A complete list of all comments and themes are included at the end of this report.

Themes

Listed in descending order of most frequently mentioned.
*The top three are indicated in **bold text**.*

1. **Essential System Infrastructure Components**
2. **Quality of Services**
3. **Youth-Relevant Programs**
4. Good Staff
5. Community Engagement

Examples of Youth Comments

Essential System Infrastructure

- "I think there are a variety of different services and variety of different agencies because there's quite a bit in Edmonton actually."
- "They're able to tell you what supports are available."
- "I appreciate that they're very welcoming."

Quality of Services

- I know staff is there 24/7. Basically, everything from mental health, social health, they can reference me to pretty much anybody.
- I appreciate the free services that they can offer and then they try to make it as fair to each and every youth

What's Working Well—Discussion

The top thing currently working well in the youth services system, according to vulnerable youth, is the existence of essential system infrastructure. The terms "infrastructure" refers to the types the things that support and enable the system to operate such as services, administrative processes and operating procedures. Vulnerable youth said that there are lots of different services available in Edmonton for youth. Youth comments related to infrastructure also include: their basic needs like food and shelter are being met; a welcoming entry into the system; safe places for youth; and a sense of community at agencies.

Top Youth-Relevant Programs

1. Employment services
2. Recreation/Social programs
3. Creative programs

Vulnerable youth identified the quality of services as the second thing currently working well. Their comments span a variety of topics including: connecting youth to plenty of services and resources; appreciating free services; providing transportation options to youth; appreciating effective services offered by private agencies; and providing a variety of services at one location.

"It feels like you're being able to empower yourself by making something that you're proud of."

—Youth comment about creative programs

In third place, vulnerable youth identified the provision of youth-relevant programs as also working well. These are programs that youth identified as liking especially and meeting their needs. Youth said they like: 1) employment services for giving them essential useful skills; 2) recreation/social prams such as attending events, and 3) creative programs for empowering youth and instilling a sense of pride.

Vulnerable youth furthermore said that staff at agencies are good, praising them for being flexible and "going out of their way" or taking "an extra stride" to help youth access services. Lastly, one youth said they like the community engagement efforts some agencies make to maintain relationships with youth after youth have exited programs.

What Could Be Improved

The following themes were developed based on the comments made by vulnerable youth about what they perceive could be improved in the youth services system. A complete list of all comments and themes are included at the end of this report.

Themes for Areas of Improvement

Listed in descending order of importance based on frequency of comments. The top three are indicated in **bold text. The remaining themes are considerably lower in frequency of comments made by youth.*

1. **Youth Care Practices**
2. **Coordinated Access & Infrastructure**
3. **Collaboration & Communication**
4. Staff
5. Better Solutions
6. Funding
7. Barriers
8. Other

Examples of Youth Comments

Youth Care Practices

- "I do wish that they made the age restriction a bit higher because like youth are considered you know 14 to 30 sometimes."
- "They should have a youth worker to help take them to places."
- "I think there should be a much higher standard for the education levels of people who can become social workers.""

Coordinated Access & Infrastructure

- "Maybe they'll have just one database and then they could see who does what."
- "So maybe if I had like a mental health phone line where you can just call in and be like, I need these services and Resources."

What Could Be Improved—Discussion

When it comes to what could be improved in the youth services system, three main themes emerged from comments made by vulnerable youth. They are: 1) youth care practices, 2) coordinated access and infrastructure, and 3) collaboration and communication. These three themes will be addressed and supported with some of the youth's comments. Details related to the remaining themes and comments associated with them including staff, better solutions, funding, and barriers can be found at the end of this report.

The three main themes are closely distributed in terms of the number of comments made by youth. Youth comments related to the theme of youth care practices provide insight into what vulnerable youth consider as important in their care. The comments cover many topics, but vulnerable youth mentioned most frequently that improvements could be made to age eligibility for services and outreach support. Some youth said that the eligibility criteria should be extended to include older youth because they believe this youth demographic is not being adequately served. In terms of outreach support, some youth said they needed more direct and hands-on assistance to help them access services. Youth comments reveal that they feel alone and overwhelmed by having to take initiative on their own to gain access to services, and they would prefer to have a youth worker accompany them in person. Other youth commented that the soft people skills of agency staff could be improved. Some said, for example, that staff should be more open, kind and easygoing. Other ideas mentioned by vulnerable youth include the need for better education and training standards for social workers and the need for more clothing options for males.

"More information about other programs. Even though the agencies are separate, they should provide more information about the separate agencies."

—Youth comment about improving communication

Comments related to the theme of coordinated access and infrastructure reflect vulnerable youth's ideas about improved service coordination. Youth's comments spanned several topics, some with more frequency than others. Some youth said, for example, they need better coordinated referrals and coordinated access to services that meet their immediate needs (like food and shelter). Other comments include information sharing among agencies so they can better coordinate services for youth, and increased access to mental health support over the phone.

Vulnerable youth also agreed that improvement is needed when it comes to collaboration and communication among agencies and with youth. Some youth acknowledged that agencies are collaborating, but they said more collaboration is needed to help as many vulnerable youth as possible. Several comments pertain to need for improving communication. Youth said, for example, they want more information about the youth services available in Edmonton and the information resources provided should be clear and easy to read. Other youth said they would like to see more consistent and maintained communication between themselves and agencies.

Raw Comments and Coded Themes
Vulnerable Youth Interview Data

Youth Experiences in the Youth Services System—Agencies Visited

The following table summarizes high-level findings about the agencies that vulnerable youth visited while seeking services in Edmonton. Youth were interviewed using questions that prompted them to recall the steps that they took when reaching out for youth services and to name or describe the types of agencies they visited.

Youth N=12	**Indigenous Youth**	**Non-Indigenous Youth**	**Total**
Total Number of Agencies Visited	39	17	56
Average Number of Agencies Visited	5.5	3.4	
Agency Type			
Community	29	12	41
Government	7	3	10
Other	3	2	5
Total	39	17	56

Emotional Experiences of Youth—Raw Comments

What emotions did you feel at the time?				
Part of Journey in Youth Services System	**Negative Emotions Experienced**	**Positive Emotions Experienced**	**Neutral Emotions**	**Other**
Entering System **X 26 emotions**	• frustrated • anxious • disrespected • upset • overwhelmed • scared • anxious • depressed • down a little bit • not pleased about circumstances • mixed up • bored • helpless • anxious • empty • terrified	• relieved • calm • relaxed • good • surprised • relaxed • hopeful • happy • thankful		
Next steps (Middle) **X21 emotions**	• overwhelmed • scared • bored • depressed • downhill • gave up • hopeless • anxiety • stressed • anxiety • fear	• positive • supported • supported • calm • proud • freedom • enjoyment • not worried • carefree • relieved		• not applicable • not applicable • not applicable
Exiting System **X12 emotions**	• angry • underwhelmed • defeated • drained • unvalued • traumatized • anxiety • depression • conflicted	• relaxed • positive • joyful		• information not available • information not available • information not available

Emotions continued

Thinking of your entire experience seeking help from agencies, what impact did interactions with agency staff have on your emotional well-being?		
Negative Comments (x6)	**Positive comments (x17)**	**Neutral comments (x1)**
• Most of the staff I've noticed are pretty good but like, when there comes to a fight, sometimes they don't step in, like that one actually will do you know, you know, for the most part, they seem to try their best. • The staff don't seem like they care as much, except for the team aide. • The second interaction started off as positive and then regressed into, like her disbelief that my home. She was very, very convinced that my ex-home was a safe place for me emotionally, physically, and that was unfortunate. • They seem like they are too busy and they just didn't really care • I just think that there's a lot of discrimination and they should go out there and get the youth and believe in because some of them just don't care. • You do catch people on their off days where they're not happy. They're not wanting to see you, but it's their job to see you and be there for you.	• I think the staff themselves. I get along with them, most of them pretty well because I don't get into trouble and I always try to help. • I'm being honest, I think even staff trying to like get along with the kids who are high and stuff to try to make them feel like they have someone. • They're very helpful, very helpful. • They actually want to get to know why you're here, what they can do to help you get out of here. • They help you. Makes me feel good. Like, they can connect to your problems & stuff. • Some of them have been there, so they can relate to it. • I don't actually have to access these programs anymore, and I still do come back all the time because I really enjoy the staff. • They're really supportive of no matter what you're doing. Like, if you tell them about it, they'll hype you up. It's really great. It's really a great sense of positivity. • It was very positive direction. She was very understanding, she's very relatable. And I'd say it had a positive effect on my emotional well-being. • Honestly, before I started coming to here, like all these places, I was in a really bad headspace and now I have those people to talk to that I can like trust. They won't go to tell the people my stuff that I want don't want anyone to tell. Like I can talk to her about anything because me and are her super close now. I have those people and I would probably just be the sad sack that I was born.	• Staff are great. Yes, but I don't like them because of religious standards.

	So, they've been crucial, really now they have been. I don't like talking about my issues but I will talk to them about stuff. • [They} stick their neck out to support you in some way in order to like, sympathize with the situation or seek help and get help, maintain help. They push forward for things doing things, right. They get things done. • The workers here are good. They help out a lot. you got to put in 50 and they do the other 50, you know. Like half & half. But here, they always care what, how you feel. They ask how you feel and stuff, if you're OK and whatnot. • Over there was all right because I usually didn't deal with things right away because of the partying and stuff, and then eventually I finally go. They seemed alright. • I enjoyed meeting up with certain people because for whatever reason, they were not even in the same shoes as me…It's like they were sent just for me…not just for me, but for whoever needed it. They took care of me. • [They did have a positive impact] if I was upset and really addressed my needs and ensured that they knew exactly what I wanted. • People can only help you as much as they're able to understand, right. That's the thing. It really depends on honestly, what you actually need and whether you're able to give yourself the chance to have individuals be on the same page. • For the most part I feel like most frontline workers do their best to show compassion to people.	

Youth Perceptions of Safety While at Agencies—Raw Comments

**Comments were coded as one response for each of the 12 vulnerable youth who were interviewed. Some youth shared several comments related to their response. All comments are included below.*

Did you have any concerns about your safety where you went, as in the part of Edmonton you visited?	
Comments—Concerns About Safety	**Comments—Not concerned about safety**
• This area? Yes (South of the River); there's a lot of kids that come that are either doing meth or drunk, and they steal your stuff, they threaten you and it's just not the best. • I had a kid come up to me and my boyfriend and threatening to stab and bear mays me, because of some girl that didn't like me being with him, because she wanted my boyfriend, so just like childish stuff, and you can end up dead because of it around this area, and it's pretty scary. • There's a couple incidents recently. Like this one girl is going up against a black boy. He was talking to the rest of the kids, and he didn't want to talk to her and it wasn't anything against like her race. She was Indian. And but she turned it into being racist because she was kind of drunk and she was being racist and was threatening him and going at him. And she got removed from the Nexus shelter, but she still had to come here. So, it's not really like safe. • Didn't know what Whyte Ave was about like how, sketchy. Literally, on my second day here, someone tried to spray me in the face. They've tried to threaten to hurt me, you might try to rob me and stuff because I was like looking at them. That's when I realized that this place is terrible. This place deserves its bad reputation • Like I'm not nothing like these people. I don't smoke, I don't smoke weed and drink. I don't do none of that. Like, I'm not hard, I speak respectfully, I speak like - you know, I graduated. No one else frickin' graduated seems. • sometimes I felt unsafe because of the people that were there. And the fights… • I know, sometimes people will, like, be mad at me or whatever. And I'll get mad at them. They'll be like a little conflict, but nothing	• No • Like, inside the buildings, you're quite safe. • It comes to being respectful to people, because like the people that access are not always the safest people. But if you're respectful with them, they're respectful to you. • So yeah, like I've never felt unsafe myself. But I also have like, my background and stuff. I had no reason to feel unsafe. I know how to protect myself. I felt very confident in myself. If I was not to have that I probably would be a little more worried. • No. Not at all. • No, I didn't. There was lots of unsafe stuff happening around there. It was the dangerous area. • With high risk youth going to an agency, you have a certain amount of predictability and regards to what to expect with their behaviors. So like, sometimes things don't get out of hand with a youth or they would escalate and start yelling at a staff because they didn't feel like their needs were getting that. • No • Definitely say Well, yeah, safe, safe physically, mostly • No • No • No, was never a safety concern because everything's pretty individualized. Like the workers will come out to meet you at your place you never see any other clients.

really big happened except the one time I got beat up, but I learned from it. • I kind of always feel like somebody's following me or, like, it's from the schizophrenia or the drug abuse or whatever. So, I always feel like these people following me doing stuff behind my back. • Probably downtown because there's largest Street homeless people on drugs, medications and not safe, you know, you don't know what people can do right? • So a bit scary. I don't feel scared anyway. Unless it's a big crowd of people coming after me with steak-knives and shit. Other than that, I'm not worried about it. • Sometimes, there's an outbreak and I don't freakin' understand the madness, but I should be prepared for it. Like no I'm not worried unless there's a group of people coming to stab me up or something. like if I hear like, "They're coming!" When it comes, it makes me all edgy. • that camera… that they have doesn't have audio, so they don't even know if someone's like going at you or anything. • I didn't have like a locker and I just kept my duffel bag underneath my bed. Didn't know if my stuff was going to get stolen. • So, like, being once you're in the programs. It's safe, but like, if you're actually on the streets, you know, around Whyte Ave it's not the safest like you have to make sure that like if you're walking certain ways, you have to always keep your eye out • It's a little bit more stressful and a little bit more dangerous in Edmonton. Nothing's the same here. • When drinking too much downtown, he became a threat or was vulnerable. • I just feel like I get followed different places and stuff.	

Youth Perceptions of Safety While at Agencies—continued

The following table compares feedback from vulnerable youth about their perceptions of safety while visiting agencies for services. It uses feedback from youth as it relates to their perceptions of safety at two different stages in their journey seeking help in the youth services system: 1) upon entry into the youth services system with their first visit to an agency, and 2) the next agencies they visited after entry into the system. There are 12 vulnerable youth in sample: seven are Indigenous youth while five are non-Indigenous. Their responses were compared at two different stages in the youth services system; therefore, the numbers below reflect a doubling of their responses. The table below shows a difference between vulnerable Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in their perceptions of safety. Indigenous youth were more likely to report safety concerns than non-Indigenous youth.

Comparison of safety concerns: Indigenous vs Non-Indigenous Youth		
Youth N=12	**Yes, Safety Concerns (Number of Youth)**	**No Safety Concerns (Number of Youth)**
Indigenous	9	5
Non-Indigenous	4	6

When reviewing the comments made by Indigenous youth (see the table on the previous page for comments made by all vulnerable youth), they reported feeling unsafe in relation either to the location of the agency or to violence among other youth at the agency. Non-Indigenous youth who reported feeling unsafe shared the same concerns.

Youth Perceptions on Helpfulness of Services—Raw Comments

Thinking of your entire experience seeking support from agencies, how helpful were the services you received from the agencies you visited?
Comments N=12 youth
• They weren't that helpful because I ended up being back in the shelter and that's because of Alberta Works. • I would say Nexus was helpful, pretty helpful. Yeah. Very good; the Armory is proving to be more helpful. • Yah, it was very helpful. They had everything I needed. They suggested things. • So, like, personally, I felt I found it was super helpful. • Five out of 10; nine out of 10 even because Nexus has been excellent and providing me everything I can possibly need. • Super helpful. • I'd say sort of helpful. • Alberta Works, not helpful; Boyle and YESS, very helpful. • Yeah, so like out of five, I'd put it like a three. • Somewhat helpful. • Not very helpful. • Pretty helpful. Yeah, overall pretty helpful.

Youth Opinions on Ability of Youth Services System to Meet Their Needs—Raw Comments

Thinking of your entire experience, how would you describe the ability of the youth services system to meet your needs?

Comments N=12 youth

- I think they can meet the needs but they don't stay meeting the needs. Like as soon as they feel like they've accomplished the job, they like don't fully put in the effort or the communication doesn't seem to add up anymore.
- I'd say they're a very able body to meet my needs.
- They helped with everything I needed. They were well-organized. If there wasn't something there and I needed it, they would get it for me.
- A lot of the agencies had shortcomings, but all of the agencies, as they worked together and made up for the other agencies. Yeah, like as a whole, it was pretty excellent. But individually, it wasn't like, I mean, it wasn't bad. It wasn't good.
- I'd say they've done very, very well.
- I actually haven't really thought about that. I never really had anything I needed to get done. I want to finish school. I want to get a job. Yep, and they're helping me with those.
- Yeah, they all did.
- You try and then they help you. Other places, you have to deal with all these different things and then you get help. It just depends on a person and just do everything and try and that is when you get things done. But I didn't really. I was under the influence of all drugs. I was dealing with other things on the street. I didn't really care most of the time.
- Not answered
- Generally, but there's definitely some things I could have done to help myself.
- Social Services has cut me off, and then they just cut me off and then I have to go check in and they often they just say, "Checks coming in next week," or something like that. And then they just keep putting it over and then I get it. And then they make me go get all the paperwork. Then they just throw all the paperwork away. They don't even look at it. And then it's like, OK, just throw it away. Send me on the next challenge.
- Not answered

Youth Attitudes Towards Information Sharing—Raw Comments

How did you feel about sharing your personal information?

Comments N=12 youth

- It's kind of overwhelming, especially if you're just ending up in the shelter. It's a lot to handle. And it can be a little too much sometimes what they do.
- So, no. I mean, my name and my birthday is not really nothing to hide.
- I was ok with it because I knew they weren't going to give it out.
- I think it was good. It was always behind closed doors, so I always trust them. Information has stayed at that or has been destroyed. It's never been a problem.
- I wouldn't have much to hide, and you just have to….I guess we all just have to trust in a way that our information is kept securely. Everyone is open to potential hacking you know.
- Not answered.
- I feel comfortable with giving people the trust and keeping it confidential.
- They thought I was lying at first. I told him I wasn't lying. I told them the truth and they still didn't help me. They think I'm homeless so I must be lying, I must be high on drugs or something. So it's like discrimination and racisim. Pretty much discrimination.
- Not Answered.
- I'm not worried.
- Just share to the whole world. Give it to whoever you want. I don't care because they're just going to call the cops and run you know, and give it to anyone anyway.
- I thought that like my rights were kind of like all looked over.

Comparison of Concerns Sharing Personal Information: Indigenous vs Non-Indigenous Youth

Youth N=12	Yes, Concerned (Number of Youth)	Not Concerned (Number of Youth)	Not Answered
Indigenous (N=7)	2	4	1
Non-Indigenous (N=5)	0	5	0
Total	2	9	1

What's Working Well — Raw Comments and Themes

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments	
Essential System Infrastructure Components X12	▯ Well, I think there are a variety of different services and variety of different agencies. Because there's quite a bit in Edmonton actually. ▯ I think that variety is what the major thing is. There's a lot of different programs that do different things. And that makes them pretty excellent. ▯ The youth emergencies such as service, yes. ▯ What they're doing is providing at least two meals. Yeah, at least two meals a day assuming you don't go to ARC. In which if you do go to ARC are getting at least three meals a day. They give you a safe place to sleep. Then you have more safe places to sleep than most other places, and there are beds and blankets and sheets and pillows. It's incredible. ▯ I mean, at first, I thought, Hey, I hated it. I hated coming to these places. Because there's nothing else to do during the day. But now I do have stuff I can do during the day. I choose not to because I love being here.	▯ Getting the basic needs met... They have food, here they have shelter. ▯ A lot going for the youth. ▯ I just think there's good for the youth. Youth need help on our streets. ▯ They're able to tell you what supports are available. ▯ I appreciate that they're very welcoming. ▯ I appreciate that they have a safe space to go to, most importantly. ▯ Like their protocols and things where they do lock down…They lock everybody in the rooms and they say don't come out.
Quality of Services x8	▯ If you if you follow the rules, they'll give you more than that can normally give you. They give you access to things. ▯ There's a trend I noticed from personal experience…but private agencies independent of the government or who are contracted by the government or government officials tend to be a better environment, a better experience and …tend to be more adept. They are adept at handling these things in a manner that both supports the child, kid, young adult, whatever in what they're trying to do. ▯ Because I always get the same treatment and I'll see my staff mostly for a long time, or six years. And t's just plain and simple. How do you get a great lunch and suppers and then you go there at 3 in the morning, go to sleep. And it's really good. We never have a problem. ▯ I know staff is there 24/7. Basically, everything from mental health, social health, they can reference me to pretty much anybody.	▯ I appreciate the free services that they can offer and then they try to make it as fair to each and every youth as they can and not like make things specific to specific use. ▯ They have bus tickets and things that help youth get around the city to appointments. They have bus tickets and bus passes for you. ▯ They're very connecting into resources. ▯ I like the variety that iHuman offers with like outreach workers, mental health, counselors, psychologists, psychologist on site, nurses on site, creativity studios, mothers' help, like a room for parents to go to and feel safe with their kids.

What's Working Well — Raw Comments and Themes continued

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments N= 12 respondents	
Youth-Relevant Programs X6	▯ The kids who are going into this session [Employment Program] say it's helping them a lot because they're going to help with like rent, plus they get paid for attending their program. And then it helps them with work essential skills like conflict resolution, anger management, all of it. ▯ [Employment Program] It helps them have the right foot forward for when they do need to get like another job right after. So, I feel like they're doing something. ▯ I've noticed that also with the Armory, the trips, they take the kids on like the West End & the football game. The kids seem to actually feel like real people, like they fit in, when they actually get to do what people with money get to do.	▯ (relating to the employment program) Trained in basic work skills but also your emotions and stuff. Like how to act while at work. You show your anger and control your emotions, and then we go observe people working. And then we work. ▯ I like how they have certain events to go out on. They offered the football game the other day. The Water Park was today, we go to the gym every Monday and Thursday. So, you have different things to get us out to so we're not just sitting around all day. ▯ Here's like music and art studios. It feels like you're being able to empower yourself by making something that you're proud of.
Good Staff X4	▯ I think at Jasper Place Wellness Centre, he kind of takes like an extra stride to help people more in some sense. ▯ The people, they're good workers. They're flexible, their hours and what they can give us.	▯ If they if they don't have something, they will go out of their way and try to try to bring it here for you to access. ▯ They'll go out a way to make sure that they will help you.
Community Engagement X1	▯ They've really worked hard to like continue that relationship even after I've aged out because I'm considered alumni now.	

What Could Be Improved – Raw Comments and Themes

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments N= 12 respondents	
Youth Care Practices X11	▯ I think there should be a much higher standard for the education levels of people who can become Social workers as well as there should be some sort of sociology, psychology, philosophy course, required for those said people and a higher like percentage standard. And they should have to pass a test in ethics. ▯ I think there should be a higher incentive to pursue life outside of the shelter because as the quality of shelter improves, so does the living quality. ▯ I feel like they don't have, I feel like the guys get excluded with the clothes. ▯ They don't have many snacks anymore. ▯ They should be more easygoing, have a youth worker maybe go with you. Like here a Worker takes you over and actually helps you get a place. ▯ Maybe you should teach (life skills) to youth. ▯ Yeah, just like sitting there for support. Just to know I have someone just so I'm not alone on the phone. Somebody else could have a team on their way. I would get bad anxiety, things like that.	▯ There's no place like the in the city for anybody that's youth, not my age and, you know, or downtown even that's really good. ▯ I do wish that they made the age restriction a bit higher because like youth are considered you know 14 to 30 sometimes. ▯ I guess more openness and kindness to like other workers like maybe like don't answer so mainly on the phone to other workers. ▯ They should have a youth worker to help take them to places. Yeah, transportation. Usually can jump on a bus or the worker can set a date. You can go with them to wherever, you know. That would have been way easier. You don't know what to expect the first time. You don't know what to do. You don't have ID. You don't know what to bring.
Coordinated Access & Infrastructure X9	▯ Maybe they'll have just one database and then they could see who does what. ▯ They have it all pretty much in one building. Because there they have probation and all the different things in the one building. They should just have a everything on one so you can deal with everything, just put it on one piece of paper. ▯ Give me the information and say, "This is what I got from you. This is what you need to get." I can't help you? I don't like, but that's your job. You're supposed to help me. I'm here because I need your help. And then they'll be like, "I still can't help you. I'm sorry." And I'm like, what would you like? Why are you even here? What do you get paid for? I just got a recommendation from somebody to come here. ▯ I just don't know how you can have better access to the Children's Advocate. I think I accessed the Children's advocate like four or five times over social workers who were just like terrible to me. ▯ I feel like there could be a better process as well (Children's Advocate).	▯ Let's say as a worker, you know what? I'm 22 years old. I need a place to stay. She'd say, "Okay, it takes about six weeks until we can get some…" Six weeks! It's so long when you're on the street. So, do you have any money for me social worker? Do you have any coupons? I'm only going to the places that help you know feed the less fortunate. ▯ Yeah, to like efficiency in regards to like not feeling like our time isn't valued ▯ So like to have people prepared for that and agencies prepared for that, and like being aware this is my referral. ▯ So maybe if I had like a mental health phone line where you can just call in and be like, I need these services and resources because my mental health is weak. They don't they don't have like a random 211 person offering to hook them up with a mental health counselor when maybe that's not what they need. Maybe they need an outlet.

What Could Be Improved – Raw Comments and Themes continued

Theme and Total # Comments	Individual Comments N= 12 respondents	
Collaboration & Communication X9	▯ As soon as they feel they've accomplished the job, they don't fully put into the effort or the communication doesn't seem to add up anymore. It is not maintained, especially with my Alberta Works, I mean. We had to email him 10 times a day and still got no response like until four days later. It worked at first, and it was very maintained at first, and then it's as if the workers or whatever get lazy or feel too comfortable and they just don't have to put in as much effort. ▯ If they could stay consistent, they stay talking with who they are working with. Talk amongst each other and make everything more clear. ▯ More information about other programs. Even though the agencies are separate, they should provide more information about the separate agencies. ▯ Alberta Works, I don't know what they do.	▯ I think that if it's possible, the agencies should work together more, even though they do as much as possible. ▯ I feel like because of the low number of staff that there's not enough time to reach out to other agencies. ▯ More collaboration, for sure. Collaboration is definitely necessary in regards to client services and frontline workers being able to like help as many people as they can. ▯ I would suggest that perhaps we can help more more people if you advertise more. If there's advertising about it, but there's no space for more, that's a problem. ▯ The resource pamphlets should be drawn out better. I know they have categories and things like that but to make all those phone calls is very intimidating.
Staff X2	▯ There's like two different shifts of staff, and one of those shifts is newer staff. Like the rules seem to change between the two shifts. Like we'll get away with something here and then we won't be allowed to do here. So, inconsistent.	▯ Maybe more staffing, because more staffing, the more we're able to deal with the quantity of clients and whatnot.
Better Solutions X2	▯ If they think we can make a better choice in some way, like (green) or, or find an easier way to deal with the solution faster, that'd be okay too,	▯ So if they see they take on a certain amount of people, are dealing with certain people, because it's like more risk and more people are at risk - so it's like a higher number of like people that need help right so they come up with something new or something better instead of all the same cut and dry routine
Funding X1	▯ More funding.	
Barriers X1	▯ You know, they are discriminatory against you and there's systemic discrimination as well in themselves & they've put it on to you to help you less than their other youth and you know that	
Other X1	▯ It doesn't really say anything like what's the charge, Like money wise or something.	

Appendix C

A Literature Review of Collaborative Models in Youth Services: Emerging Best Practices

This literature review was prepared for Centre Hope in 2019.

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Executive Summary

There is growing interest in the field of youth services in Canada and around the world to improve service delivery in light of the growing and increasing complex needs facing today's vulnerable youth. Youth are seeking services to meet their needs including homelessness, addictions, mental health, and gender and sexual orientation. Many individual service providers are facing challenges to meet these growing needs and are seeking innovative solutions to increase access to services and to better help vulnerable youth. This report examines current challenges facing service providers to improve the delivery of services for vulnerable youth. It also considers ways in which providers can make impactful change at a systems level. In other words, it considers change involving several providers in the youth services system through intentional coordination of services. This report also examines progress being made through collaboration among providers. This report focuses on evidence emerging in Alberta, across Canada, and around the world. It examines challenges in the field of youth services along with emerging best practices and models to address them. Evidence will be presented as well as recommendations and actionable steps that service providers can follow and take to introduce change at a systems level.

Key Highlights:

- This report examines a total of 15 grey literature and scholarly reports published between 2015 and 2019 with a focus on Alberta and Canadian sources.
- The sample includes research on current challenges facing youth service providers as well as emerging collaboration trends. It includes research spanning mental health, addictions, and homelessness. Specific efforts were made to include research on Indigenous youth given growth in urban Indigenous youth populations in Edmonton and across Canada.
- The definition of youth is inconsistent within the research sample.
- Four main challenges in the delivery of youth services emerged within the research:
- 1) collaboration among agencies; 2) vulnerable youth's access to services and particular challenges facing Indigenous youth; and 3) eligibility criteria and transition services and 4) funding.
- Six best practices emerged to guide systems-level change in the delivery of youth services through multi-agency efforts. They include universal common principles of collaborative youth service models: 1) collaboration, 2) youth engagement, 3) evidence-based approaches in youth care, 4) Indigenous-specific services 5) information sharing, and 6) evaluation.
- Collaboration is identified as a key recommendation for transforming youth services.
- Integrated youth services or "youth service hubs" emerged within the sample as the leading model for collaboration across the world (including Canada), primarily within mental health and addictions service delivery. However, minimal evaluation of the models has occurred.
- While evaluation evidence of collaborative youth service models is limited at this time, universal common principles for integrated service models have emerged. These principles offer a good starting point to guide the development of collaborative youth service models. They are incorporated in the six recommendations made in this report.

Background

As the needs of vulnerable youth become increasingly complex, youth service practitioners are facing a number of challenges in delivering services that meet the diverse needs of youth. Growing Indigenous populations, growing needs of LGBTQ2S youth (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and 2-Spirit), growing rates of mental health, addictions, and homelessness along with the intersection of these growing areas requires youth service practitioners to provide complex services to help vulnerable youth. Within this context, practitioners strive to deliver positive outcomes for youth; yet, current practice suggests many vulnerable youth continue to slip through the proverbial cracks. Research shows that youth service providers across Alberta and Canada face a number of common challenges that impact their work and the vulnerable youth they serve. Four main challenges have been identified: 1) collaboration among agencies, 2) inappropriate access to services for youth; 2) inconsistent eligibility criteria and insufficient transition support for youth; and 4) inadequate funding.

At the same time, a trend has been emerging. Many individual youth services agencies are recognizing a need to come together to determine how they can collectively better meet the needs of vulnerable youth. To do this, they are turning to collaborative models of service delivery. Researchers have been studying these models and their effectiveness. From their work, best practices in collaborative models are emerging. Evaluation of the effectiveness of these models, however, is currently limited. Despite this, research points to universal principles that can help guide practitioners to create collaborative youth services models.

First, use of the term youth within this report requires clarification. At the most basic level, service providers cannot seem to agree on the definition of youth. Typically speaking, the term “youth” encompasses individuals between the ages of 11 to 25. However, this definition can vary depending on the service provider. Furthermore, this definition does not take into account the functioning level and development of youth. For the purpose of this report, the term “youth” refers to the chronological ages of individuals between the ages of 11 and 25.

Challenges Facing Youth Services

Four main challenges in the delivery of youth services emerged within the research: 1) collaboration, 2) access to services, 3) eligibility criteria and transition support, and 4) funding. Each challenge will be briefly explained. Some challenges are interrelated.

Collaboration among youth service providers emerged as the most significant challenge. The majority of the research speaks to the need for collaboration to overcome the main challenges youth services face. Indeed, research emphasizes that youth service providers across Canada recognize collaboration is a necessity. However, little research demonstrates how collaboration is to be done. One main thing is clear, and that’s the role that funding plays in preventing effective collaboration among service providers. Research points to the nature of funding models for non-profit agencies as a main source of the problem. Funding models are characterized by short funding cycles and limited resources, which in turn promote competition between agencies and inhibit collaboration[1]. This circumstance additionally creates system fragmentation.[2] These challenges to collaborate are further compounded by the concerns of many service providers to share information amongst themselves as it relates to vulnerable youth and meeting their needs. Providers’ concerns about maintaining confidentiality and privacy of youth’s information prevents the effective sharing of information that is required to enable collaboration.

Research also identifies access to services as another challenge. Access refers to the way vulnerable youth access services as well as the services available to youth. According to the research, vulnerable youth often lack knowledge of the available resources to them. Research suggests youth tend to access multiple sector services or external services rather than directly connecting with the specific service they need. For example, youth with mental health or addictions issues often go to schools and drop-in centres rather than directly accessing mental health or addictions support.[3] Furthermore, the lack of timely access to services creates further challenges. Youth service providers often must refer youth to waitlists because of a lack of resources. Vulnerable youth then become lost in the referral process or do not follow through with resource information provided.

Challenges to access services become evidently clear when looking at the experiences of Indigenous youth. The urban Indigenous population is the fastest growing youth demographic in Canada.[4] In fact, Edmonton has the second largest urban Indigenous population in Canada.[5] Canada’s history of colonization, intergenerational trauma, and destruction of traditional values

1 *Exploring Mental Health Services and Supports for Children, Youth and Families in Calgary (2017)* (p. 63).
2 Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review (2019) (p. 2).
3 Youth Services System Review: Moving from Knowledge Gathering to Implementation Through Collaboration Youth Engagement, and Exploring Local Community Needs (2017) (pp. 134-135).
4 Supporting Indigenous Youth Experiencing Homeless. In *Mental Health and Addiction Interventions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Practical Strategies for Front-line Providers (2018)* (p. 89).
5 Transforming youth mental health services in a large centre: ACCESS Open Minds *Edmonton (2019)* cites Statistics Canada 2016 data.

have left Indigenous populations at greater risk of negative health outcomes.[6] Many Indigenous youth are leaving reserves and their communities to migrate to urban centres in hopes of accessing services. However, research shows that this is not happening. Researchers agree that structural racism and societal stereotypes as well as a lack of culturally appropriate and specific services continue to negatively impact vulnerable Indigenous youth's ability to access services. Instead of accessing services, many Indigenous youth are becoming entrenched in street-life.[7] Subsequently, Canada has seen an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system as well as within the youth criminal justice system.[8]

Eligibility criteria create yet another challenge in the delivery of youth services and are interrelated to the subsequent problem of inadequate support for vulnerable youth as they transition between youth and adult services. According to the research, strict age eligibility criteria for youth emerge as a barrier to effective service delivery. Service providers acknowledge and advocate for the need for youth-specific services; however, specific age criteria are limiting and do not account for development-specific challenges related to youth.[9] Subsequently, youth service providers are faced with unique challenges as they transition vulnerable youth from the youth system and into adult systems. Research shows transition services between youth and adult systems are limited and scarce. Currently in Canada, data related to moving youth between the youth and adult systems is not available, nor has provincial or federal funding been dedicated to this.[10] While these findings are primarily discussed within mental health and addictions research, the findings are applicable to other youth service areas, especially services for homeless youth.[11]

[6] *A national study of Indigenous youth homelessness in Canada (2018) (p. 2).*
[7] *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness (2016).*
[8] *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015)* (pp. 177-178, 245).
[9] *National Youth Screening Project: Part 2 Putting the "Youth: in Youth-Focused Services A Focus on Developmentally-Informed Care* (2017) (p.10) further explains the importance of developmentally informed care in depth.
[10] *Taking the Next Step Forward: Building a Responsive Mental Health and Addictions System for Emerging Adults (2015)* (pg. 5). See this article for further examination of the challenges presented in transitioning services. *Exploring Mental Health Services and Supports for Children, Youth and Families in Calgary (2017)* shares findings in an Alberta context.
[11] Transforming youth mental health services in a large centre: ACCESS Open Minds Edmonton *(2019)* speaks to how criteria has impacted youth in Alberta specifically. *Supporting Health and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (2015)* (p. 5).

Research Findings

Despite the main challenges facing youth service providers, research shows that service providers have made progress in addressing some of these challenges and achieving systems-level change to improve the delivery of services to vulnerable youth. Collaborative youth service models show some promise. Six best practices emerged from the research. They include universal common principles of collaborative youth service models: 1) collaboration, 2) youth engagement, 3) evidence-based approaches in youth care, 4) Indigenous-specific services 5) information sharing, and 6) evaluation. Researchers agree that collaboration plays a primary role in enabling providers to address challenges in the delivery of youth services. They also agree there is a lack of adequate evaluation of these best practices. The six best practices will be examined followed by a brief description of some emerging collaborative youth models.

Among the research, one scholarly article emerges as a seminal work providing guidance for collaborative youth service models. It merits some attention given its apparent importance within the field of research and within this report. Published in 2019, this work examines common characteristics among integrated community-based youth service hub (ICYSH) models around the world with a focus on mental health services. Settipani et al.'s article, called *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: A scoping review,* is unique in providing a meta-analysis that sheds light on current emerging best practices and common principles among models. In this way, it provides much needed analysis within the field of research. Among the 19 models examined, models in Canada figure prominently and are of interest. While mental health is the focus of this research, the findings are still relevant and useful for services aimed at vulnerable youth in the areas of homelessness and addictions. This seminal work identifies five common principles emerging from youth service hub models. They are: 1) improved access to services, 2) youth and family engagement and participation, 3) youth friendly settings and services, 4) evidence-informed approaches, and 5) partnerships and collaboration. This research highlights the lack of adequate evaluation to determine the success of these collaborative youth service hub models. However, it does conclude that adopting the common principles are a good place for practitioners to start for developing collaborative models based on coordinated services. Findings from this seminal research will be examined along with findings from other research gathered.

A. Emerging Best Practices

Collaboration

Researchers agree that collaboration among service providers is a key best practice for practitioners to adopt as a way to address challenges in the delivery youth services. As for how collaboration happens, the research speaks to the concept of collaboration as a mechanism for systems-level change, involving both multi-agency to multi-sectoral collaboration. The literature suggests collaboration is needed not only between individual agencies, but also with larger government sectors such as health, social services, and education.[12] Much of the research, however, does not provide a clear pathway for practitioners to follow to engage in collaborative efforts. Nevertheless, Settipani et al.'s seminal research suggests ways for collaboration to happen through examples of integrated youth service hub models. As defined by the researchers, "integrated community-based youth service hubs (ICYSHs) reflect models of care that provide comprehensive, youth-focused services, including mental health services, health and other community and social services in a single community-based setting, sometimes referred to as "one-stop shops", with 'youth' defined to include both adolescents and young adults."[13] The researchers show that integrated youth service hub models tend to coordinate infrastructure and care to make the collaboration work. Coordinated infrastructure includes everything required to integrate services such as shared administrative processes, governance, data sharing, and evaluation among the collaborating providers. Settipani et al. suggest shared structures and processes in care create a common approach across service providers, often made effective with the appointment of a lead agency. The researchers conclude that there is some evidence showing collaborative care and infrastructure is indeed needed to achieve successful outcomes for vulnerable youth with high or complex needs.[14] They agree in general, however, there is insufficient information as to how integrated youth service hub models work in terms of organization structure, funding models, and implementation strategies.[15] Across all the research examined, effective leadership, youth friendly spaces, coordinated access, ongoing evaluation, and information sharing mechanisms were identified as playing a key role in collaboration.[16] Ultimately, researchers agree that collaboration allows providers to help increase youth's access to services including early intervention services, to better support system transitions, and to create consistency in definitions used by providers and in evaluation practices.[17]

Role of Youth Engagement

Several researchers agree that engagement of vulnerable youth has an important role to play in collaboration efforts among youth service providers. Youth are directly impacted by processes aimed at changing the services provided to them. They can provide significant insight about gaps within the youth services system and the impact of those gaps on their well-being. In Settipani et al.'s seminal work, researchers identified youth and family engagement as a common principle among integrated youth service hub collaborations. According to the models they examined, engagement typically took place using youth advisory groups, focus groups, surveys, and online feedback gathered from social media and websites.[18] Furthermore, in the models examined, many providers involved youth and families in the design, implementation and evaluation of collaborative youth service models. Providers in Ontario have been using a variety of mechanisms to engage youth from in-person conversations to online interfaces including social media and web surveys.[19] In Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Report, recommendations include engaging Indigenous youth across the country in systems change.[20]

Evidence-Based Approaches

Use of evidence-based practices in youth care is emphasized as a best practice within the research. Researchers also emphasize the importance of training for staff in evidence-based practices. However, specific details on what constitutes evidence-based practice along with information on training processes among providers working collaboratively was generally limited within the research examined. In the mental health field, practitioners call for methods proven to be effective such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, for example. Use of developmentally-informed practices emerged in some of the research as an example of evidence-based care. Given the complex and unique needs of vulnerable youth, developmentally specific services have emerged to best serve youth. Developmentally informed practices speak not only to cognitive development but also to development of sexual and gender identity, cultural considerations, and the needs in which youth can or cannot meet for themselves given their stage in development.[21]

[12] *Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness, (2015).*
[13] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review *(2019)* (p. 2).
[14] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review *(2019)* (p. 13).
[15] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review *(2019)* (p. 26).
[16] *Community-based Mental Health Service Hubs for Youth: Environmental Scan (*2017), from *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness, Centralized Point of Access Working Group(2016)*, *Exploring Mental Health Services and Supports for Children, Youth and Families in Calgary (2017),* Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review *(2019)* (p. 13).
[17] T*aking the Next Step Forward: Building a Responsive Mental Health and Addictions System for Emerging Adults (2015)* speaks to how collaboration can address transitions between adult and youth systems.
[18] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review (2019*)* (p. 13).
[19] Youth Services System Review: Moving from Knowledge Gathering to Implementation Through Collaboration Youth Engagement, and Exploring Local Community Needs (2017) (p. 145-146), *Community-based Mental Health Service Hubs for Youth: Environmental Scan (*2017).
[20] *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada(2015*) (p .245).
[21] *National Youth Screening Project: Part 2 Putting the "Youth: in Youth-Focused Services A Focus on Developmentally-Informed Care (2017)*(pg. 10); Youth Services System Review: Moving from Knowledge Gathering to Implementation Through Collaboration Youth Engagement; and Exploring Local Community Needs (2017), *Supporting Health and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (2015)* (p. 5).

Indigenous Youth Practices

Research with a focus on Indigenous youth and the issues they face including intergenerational trauma, poverty, addictions, and homelessness, for example, presents a strong clear message about appropriate care practices. Researchers call for culturally specific approaches to care, especially within mental health and addictions services, as well as trauma-informed care given the complex trauma that Indigenous youth experience resulting from colonization. Culturally specific approaches may include approaches that embrace both Indigenous cultural approaches to healing alongside mainstream approaches to health and well-being. Some researchers say typical Western knowledge frameworks embedded in youth care practices contradict Indigenous approaches to health and healing. For this reason, they conclude that offering Indigenous-specific services is key, which includes but is not limited to such things as holistic services focused on healing and relationships.[22] Many service providers recognize the need for Indigenous youth approaches and are shifting practices.

Information Sharing

Information sharing among service providers emerges as another best practice within the research. Researchers identify effective and supportive information sharing systems as being necessary for effective collaboration among agencies. Moreover, they point to effective information sharing as playing a critical role in eliminating the retraumatizing effect that can occur when vulnerable youth re-tell their story and circumstances to multiple providers. While several researchers point to the need for effective information sharing, they acknowledge that clear direction on how to achieve it is minimal. At best, researchers suggest use of mechanisms that permit sharing that is compliant with confidentiality and existing privacy legislation.[23] In Settipani et al.'s seminal work on integrated youth service hubs, researchers found that service providers often used a single shared health record to facilitate collaboration and streamline care. Effective information sharing, according to the researchers, was often supported through coordinated infrastructure including shared data capture systems.[24]

Evaluation

Lastly, evaluation of collaborative youth service models emerged as a strong recommendation in some of the research, especially in the seminal research used to write this report. A driving factor behind this recommendation is the problem of a lack of adequate evaluation to determine the effectiveness of collaborative models in achieving outcomes. In order for adequate evaluation to take place, researchers recommend consistent and shared data collection among

[22] *Supporting Indigenous Youth Experiencing Homeless. In Mental Health and Addiction Interventions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Practical Strategies for Front-line Providers (2018)* (pp.93-95); *Towards a Deeper Understanding of Indigenous Experience of Urban Homelessness,* (p.68).

[23] *Community-based Mental Health Service Hubs for Youth: Environmental Scan (*2017) (p. 8) speaks to specific recommendations around information sharing.

[24] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review (2019) (p. 12).

service providers participating in collaborative models of service delivery.[25] Use of consistent measures enable providers to create comparative data and to use it to for evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement. According to this report's leading research, some service providers participating in integrated youth service hub models relied on online platforms to share digital information about youth and to track outcomes for evaluation purposes.[26] Researchers examined outcome data gathered to evaluate youth service hub models. The methods used for measuring outcomes varied, making it difficult to determine the magnitude of outcomes reported. Adequate evidence on outcomes of integrated youth service models is generally lacking. However, researchers found that positive outcomes related to improvements in psychological distress and psychological functioning had been reported.[27]

B. Emerging Models

Within the research examined, examples of collaborative models emerged. The majority of the research points to an integrated "hub" services model as a main collaborative model emerging among youth service providers. Canadian models figured prominently in the research. The ACCESS Open Minds Model currently operating in Edmonton is one example. The Centralized Point of Access Model operated in Toronto is another example. Both models will be briefly described to illustrate emerging models for collaboration within a Canadian context. Evaluation on the effectiveness of these models is not currently available.

ACCESS Open Minds is a model that operates across Canada in various locations. A model was established in Edmonton in 2017.[28] This model is a local example of an integrated community-based youth service hub.[29] It is operated as a partnership between a non-profit agency and Alberta Health Services (AHS) along with other stakeholders and provides coordinated care and rapid access to mental health supports for youth. ACCESS Open Minds is a lead agency, which acts as a single "hub" to assist youth in accessing mental health and addiction services. It provides youth with access to several different professionals in a centrally located space. Staff on this site include psychologists, social workers, peer support works, and care navigators. As part of their work, staff also attend other youth service agencies to provide further increased access to services for youth. The model provides multiple pathways for youth to access evidence-based interventions. Organization flexibility and on-going structural and care coordination is key to the sustainability of the project.

[25] *Community-based Mental Health Service Hubs for Youth: Environmental Scan (*2017)(p. 43) speaks to some of the barriers around evaluation as well as the report *Centralized Point of Access Working Group Report* (2016)(pp. 9-10).

[26] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review (2019*)* (p. 13).

[27] Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping revie*w (2019)* (p. 13).

[28] Transforming youth mental health services in a large urban centre: ACCESS Open Minds Edmonton (2019*).*

[29] The ACCESS Open Minds model is one of the models examined in Settipani et al.'s seminal work Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review *(*2019)

The **Centralized Point of Access Model** operates in Toronto as a collective aimed at addressing system challenges within the field of mental health for youth.[30] It was implemented in 2016. A working group meets regularly to provide direction to the lead agency overseeing the model, East Metro Youth Services. This agency provides leadership; however, staff and technical support are located at various sites. The project addresses the need for multi-system, multi-agency collaboration in order to address the needs of young people. The model is based on co-existing with existing current efforts to improve access to services. It does this by providing additional infrastructure and support for collaboration between agencies. The model was established under the direction of the Ontario Ministry and Child and Youth Services.

[30] See *Centralized Point of Access Working Group Report (2016)* for specific details of the project and recommendations for implementation.

Recommendations

Practitioners have some examples of collaborative models to improve the delivery of youth services. While research is limited in providing clear pathways for collaboration, Settipani et al.'s research provides universal common principles that can serve as a starting point for providers to develop a collaborative youth services model. Research examined in this report points to best practices that practitioners can adopt and apply to collaborative youth service models. Based on the research, the following recommendations have been made to assist practitioners:

1. Obtain and review Settipani et al.'s seminal work *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: A scoping review* as a good overview of the five common principles driving collaborative youth hub models. Practitioners will be interested in a chart provided in the article, which lists details related to all the hub models examined by the researchers. The article also provides some details on how providers coordinated infrastructure and care to improve access to services.
2. Develop a collaborative model of youth services founded on coordinated infrastructure and coordinated care. Research suggests appointing a lead agency to drive the coordination necessary to establish a collaborative model. It also suggests the use of common information sharing practices among participating providers.
3. Engage youth in the creation of the collaborative model. Provide multiple platforms of engagement to obtain feedback from youth and use youth friendly spaces.
4. Develop a coordinated care approach as part of the collaborative model and base it on evidence-informed practices. Develop services for vulnerable youth populations that require specific approaches that meet their needs, including Indigenous youth and LGBTQ2S youth.
5. Develop an evaluation framework to determine the effectiveness of the collaborative model including outcomes. Use of common and consistent data collection is advised to ensure effective evaluation. Evaluation methods should allow for information sharing that is compliant with privacy legislation and confidentiality policies.
6. Complement the collaborative model by building partnerships with agencies across all sectors involved in providing services to vulnerable youth.

Research Method

A total of 66 sources were gathered and narrowed down to 15 for inclusion in this literature review report. These 15 sources were the most recent ones produced between 2015 and 2019. A variety of search terms were used including youth services, collaboration, integration, innovation, challenges, barriers, and best practices. However, research on Indigenous youth in urban centres was missing when using these terms. Specific search terms were used to find relevant Indigenous youth services research. All research sources were coded for consideration of inclusion in this report. Given the exploratory nature of this literature review report, sources were narrowed down to a total of 15. Attempts were made to even the distribution of authors to ensure diversity in the sources.

Conclusion

Practitioners continue to face considerable challenges in delivering services to vulnerable youth. However, this report demonstrates that service providers are coming together to address these challenges through collaborative service models. This report shows some progress has been made in identifying best practices to guide practitioners in establishing collaborative youth service models. While this report shows that collaboration is indeed a leading practice, research remains limited on evidence-based practices for effective collaboration. Despite this, Settipani et al.'s research on integrated youth service hubs provides practitioners with common principles for establishing a collaborative model. Collaboration between practitioners and researchers could help advance research on collaborative youth service models, especially in the area of evaluation to determine the effectiveness of emerging models.

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Appendix D

Inventory of Youth Services of Edmonton

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Research Method and Purpose

Data were gathered to develop a current inventory of youth services available in Edmonton as a way to better understand the resources available within the city. Centre Hope approached two Alberta-based organizations, HelpSeeker and 211 Alberta, to obtain access to relevant data. HelpSeeker is virtual online data base that geographically plots social service organizations available within a community. As part of its data capture, HelpSeeker conducts manual searches of organizations including active searches for organizational listings of services. It also permits organizations free access to the data base so they can enter their information. HelpSeeker provided data it acquired in spring 2019 including the geographical locations of service providers and the types of services available in the Edmonton Metro area. Data captured by 211 Alberta identifying the issues related to youth calls to the help line was not available for use within the time limits to conduct this research.

HelpSeeker shared its data using Excel spreadsheet containing 2,771 rows of data. The data included non-youth services, so Centre Hope filtered the data and limited it only to data identified by the tag “youth.” The data were narrowed down to 1,092 rows of data, including such information as locations of organizations and services they offer (including postal codes), descriptions of services offered by organizations and the youth demographics served.

Centre Hope conducted further analysis to paint a picture of the of the location of all youth services offered in Edmonton in terms of different recognizable geographical areas of the city. This kind of analysis enables one to determine areas of the city in which services are plentiful or sparse. This analysis is important, moreover, for it considers the reality that while many organizations are located in one part of the city, the services they offer may be offered at other locations in Edmonton. The analysis reflects this reality. To do the analysis, Centre Hope designated a total of five areas of the city using postal codes. They are: North West, North East, South West, South East, and Central. Centre Hope then took location data provided by HelpSeeker and matched postal codes of services with these designated geographical areas.

Centre Hope furthermore also conducted more analysis to better identify the types of services offered by organizations as contained in the list provided by HelpSeeker. To do this, Centre Hope used categories currently used by 211 Alberta to classify issues related to calls made by youth to the help phone line. A total of nine main categories were used: 1) Housing, 2) Physical Health, 3) Mental Health, 4) Legal Services, 5) Education/Employment, 6) Indigenous Services, 7) Income Support, 8) Basic needs, and 9) Individual and Family Supports. Each of these nine categories can be broken down to further identify specific sub-categories related to them, thereby providing even more specific helpful information. For example, the category called basic needs is broken down to identify such things as food, clothing, and hygiene. Centre Hope cross-referenced these sub-categories to ensure they were placed correctly under one of the nine main categories. It did this by verifying information provided on organizations’ websites.

Further to this work, in the fall of 2019, Centre Hope took extra steps to verify the accuracy and currency of the information it created by sending it to the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team (NET) for review. Centre Hope shared the list of organizations it developed including identification of both location and service categories offered by each organization.

HelpSeeker Data Findings

Edmonton provides many services to help youth. Within the city’s limits, there are 823 programs offered to youth in 265 locations with most located in central Edmonton, according to a system-mapping tool called HelpSeeker. The tool captures data about community resources. However, the data does not represent services or programs offered specifically to vulnerable or homeless youth. Instead it represents services or programs related to youth in general. The highest concentration of programs is located in central Edmonton (46%) followed next by programs located in North East Edmonton (15%), South West (14%), North West (9%), and South East (8%). For a view of services located in Edmonton, visit Helpseeker.com.

Appendix E

Analysis of Recommendations in Reports on Improving Youth Services

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Research Method and Purpose

A total of 16 reports published in Canada within the last five years (with the exception of one) were gathered for the purpose of examining their recommendations and comparing them with recommendations made in the Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) final report. Of these 16 reports, 11 are local reports (Alberta) and five are national reports. A list of the reports is provided on the following page. The reports cover a variety of topics related to the Youth Agency Collaboration project. The topics include youth homelessness, youth and children's services, mental health, and challenges in the non-profit sector, for example. In general, the reports analyze current circumstances in the delivery of youth services and make recommendations on ways to improve services including such things as coordination of resources and information sharing.

The recommendations contained in the 16 reports were analyzed by cross-referencing them with the seven recommendations made in the Youth Agency Collaboration Final Report 2020: A Community Approach to Systems Change for Improving Edmonton's Vulnerable Youth Services. A comparative analysis was conducted to corroborate the recommendations in the YAC final report and to determine the strength and reliability of these recommendations. In this way, the analysis seeks to determine if there is alignment between local and national strategies to improve vulnerable youth services, and with the strategy outlined in the recommendations made in the YAC final report. The findings are presented in an extensive table on the following pages. Indeed, they do provide strong support for the recommendations made in the YAC final report. The table presents the seven recommendations made in the YAC final report and cross-references each one with corresponding recommendations made in the 16 reports used to conduct this research. Please note, the recommendations contained in the 16 reports are cited verbatim including the actual number they were given as part of a list of recommendations. The reports are listed in the table according to the number of recommendations that they make. Reports appear in descending order starting with those with the most recommendations that were cited.

This research is limited to the findings obtained within the small sample of reports gathered. Limitations to the research include lack of a comprehensive list of relevant reports for analysis. Further research would be required to determine more robust findings.

List of Reports

Local/Provincial

Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families. (2018). *All in for youth Year 2 Evaluation: Final Report* (pp. 1–243). Edmonton, Alberta.

Children's Services, Government of Alberta. (2018). A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow A Public Action Plan for the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations (pp. 1–54).

City of Edmonton. (2016). End Poverty in a Generation - A Road Map to Guide Our Journey (pp. 1–63). Edmonton, Alberta.

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Homeward Trust. (2015). *Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton* (pp. 1–92). Edmonton, Alberta.

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Office of The Child and Youth Advocate Alberta. (2017). *Speaking OUT: A Special Report on LGBTQ2S Young People in the Child Welfare and Youth Justice Systems* (pp. 1–48). Edmonton, AB

Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee. (2015). *Social Exclusion and Youth Who Engage in High--Risk Behaviour* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–45). Edmonton, Alberta.

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National

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Table—Comparison of Recommendations in Reports on Youth Services

Youth Agency Collaboration Final Report recommendations	Recommendations in Local and National Reports
Recommendation #1—Create a collaborative model of service provision founded on coordinated access and infrastructure as a way to increase access to services in a streamlined, consistent, timely and effective way that meets the diverse needs of vulnerable youth. 30 recommendations, 11 reports	**<u>National:</u>** **The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018** Youth Homelessness Serving Sector Recommendations**:** ● 5) Systematically identify and abolish any policies, protocols, or practices within homeless serving agencies or organizations that: ○ Create barriers to youth accessing services and supports within the youth homelessness sector. This should include altering or abolishing policies that require youth to: ■ Be homeless for a specified period of time before receiving help, ■ Meet a particular acuity standard in order to access services and supports, ■ Obtain parental permission in order to access services and supports, ■ Possess identity documents, ■ Engage in programming, education, or employment in order to receive supports, services, or benefits, or ■ Be 16 years of age or older in order to access services and supports. Provincial and Territories Recommendations: ● 4. Prioritize and support systems planning and integration (where appropriate) in all efforts to proactively address the needs of youth at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. ● 6. Engage in the ongoing review of current system barriers to assess how the prevention of youth homelessness can be improved across systems, including through integration (where appropriate) and improved access to services, supports, and housing for youth and their families. Government of Canada Recommendations: ● Prioritization of youth must be determined separate from adult prioritization within coordinated entry and collaborative planning tables to ensure timely interventions for youth. **Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015** ● Engage in the ongoing review of current system barriers to assess how prevention of youth homelessness can be improved. ● Encourage and facilitate youth access to community resources through greater information-sharing using social media. ● Increase the capabilities of community leaders, educators and service providers to identify specific intervention strategies, including appropriate referrals and supports, primarily related to identification of youth who are on the verge of or are homeless. ● Work with community organizations to streamline access to Community Residential Treatment programs for youth. ● Increase accessible information for youth to become aware of services and supports available to them. ● Increase community capacity to identify and refer youth to appropriate treatment options through increased information, collaboration and resource sharing. ● Build on existing initiatives to implement a coordinated access process for youth to ensure they receive standardized, comprehensive and accessible supports. **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018** Youth Homelessness Sector Recommendations: ● 5. Systematically identify and abolish any policies, protocols, or practices within homeless serving agencies or organizations that discriminate against youth on the basis of their identity or life experiences. Integrated Government Supports Recommendations: ● 3b) Employ a proactive approach to responding to youth at risk of homelessness, rapidly connecting youth to supports, services, and/or housing. ● 5. Implement highly accessible mechanisms through which children and youth, and their caregivers or advocates, can report system failures, violations of their rights, and failures of system actors to respond ethically, adequately, or equitably.

	Provincial/Territorial Departments and Ministries Responsible for Health Recommendations: ● 3. Engage in the ongoing review of current system barriers to accessing health and mental health supports for youth at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness. Remove or alter identified barriers to accessing care, including cost, discrimination, citizenship, proof of identity, and other factors. Meaningfully involve youth with lived experience of homelessness in these reviews and the development of alternative health and mental health care delivery mechanisms (e.g., mobile health clinics, community health hubs). Provincial and Territories Recommendations: ● 4e) Collaboration with communities to rapidly divert youth from homelessness and create rapid pathways out of homelessness for youth. **Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016** Communities and Municipalities Recommendations: ● 3.3 Community strategies should focus on systems integration to facilitate smooth transitions from homelessness and ensure no young person slips through the cracks. **<u>Local:</u>** **All in for youth Year 2 Evaluation: Final Report - 2018** ● Define each staff member's roles (agency staff and specialized school staff that are not teachers) in the school to improve knowledge and understanding of one another's roles in order to minimize overlap or 'stepping-on-toes' and ultimately increase service-delivery efficiency. ● Enhance internal communication systems to better track interventions and work being done to meet students' needs and growth. ● Find ways to capture the complexities of the wraparound support model (e.g., activities that rely on multiple organizations, how to show the complexities of this type of work). ● Enhance the visibility of programs/supports available to increase families' knowledge of all the different types of services and supports they can access in the schools. ● Enhance internal communication systems to track AIFY work (e.g., track follow through of support plans), student progress, outcomes from AIFY work.

	● Reduce agency staff turnover or more quickly fill the gap in service experienced when an agency staff member leaves a school. **Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015** ● 1.3 Establish a coordinated access and assessment strategy ○ System wide responses are designed to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable through triaging and prioritized access to housing and supports. ○ Use of common tools and protocols enables more effective flow through systems, including immediate assessments and identification of needs. **The Rainbow Alliance for Youth of Edmonton - LGBTQ2S Survey Report - 2018** ● Create a more coordinated, cohesive web of programs / services that support the entire LGBTQ2S+ communities through increased opportunities for interagency collaboration, community engagement and information sharing similar to the work currently underway through the Rainbow Alliance for Youth of Edmonton. ● Leverage existing networks and information and referral sources to develop and maintain a comprehensive guide for LGBTQ2S+ safe and aware services in Edmonton and surrounding areas (e.g., Rainbow Pages is a resource that includes a number of LGBTQ2S+ safe spaces and is available at: The Rainbow Pages). **End Poverty in a Generation - A Road Map to Guide Our Journey - 2016** ● 29. Resource a new Early Learning and Care Steering Committee to guide the implementation of an integrated system and strategy for early learning and care in Edmonton. **Community Mental Health Action Plan - 2016** ● 3.3 Coordinate with partners to expand and create interdisciplinary teams and integrated pathways that share mandates based on client needs. **Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee - 2015**

	• 10.Appropriate referrals provided when youth are banned. For example, a youth banned for intoxication would also receive a referral to an addictions resource. **Edmonton Task Force on Community Safety – Reach Report - 2009** • 4. A 24/7 service delivery model for high-needs populations. Lead development of comprehensive, coordinated access to 24-hour services for those at highest risk – youth, sexually exploited individuals and street gang members.
Recommendation #2—Create coordinated youth care practices founded on evidence-informed, inclusive and culturally appropriate approaches with a focus on prevention and post-care follow-up as a key step towards improving consistent access to quality services in sustainable ways and increasing achievement of outcomes for vulnerable youth with diverse needs. 62 recommendations, 12 reports	**<u>National:</u>** **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018** Communities Recommendations: • 1e) Implement policies and practices that proactively address the unique needs of particular populations deemed to be at greater risk of homelessness, including Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+. • 1f) Implement a focused prevention strategy to support young people who are under 16 and at risk of homelessness, supported by targeted investments. • 4a) Provide prevention and place-based services and supports for young people between the ages of 13-24. • 4d) Ensure that all young people who come in to contact with homelessness services, in either the adult or youth systems, are provided with interventions to bolster family and natural supports. • 4e) Support youth to achieve outcomes beyond housing stability, including health and wellbeing, engagement with education and/or employment, attainment of life skills, meaningful social inclusion, connection to culture, and the building of natural and family supports. Integrated Government Supports Recommendations • 4. Adopt accountability mechanisms to assess the system's progress towards proactively addressing the needs of youth at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. Government of Canada Recommendations: • 1e) Identify and advance policies and practices that proactively address the unique needs of particular populations deemed to be at greater risk of homelessness, including Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

	• 1f) Implement a focused prevention strategy to support young people who are under 16 and at risk of homelessness, supported by targeted investments. • 1g) Work with Indigenous communities to develop and implement a focused homelessness prevention strategy for Indigenous youth and their families, supported by targeted investments. • 1d) Work with communities to develop plans to prevent and end youth homelessness, with a particular emphasis on intervening well before a young person experiences homelessness, and exiting youth from homelessness as rapidly as possible. • 1e) Work with communities to implement policies and practices that proactively address the unique needs of particular populations deemed to be at greater risk of homelessness, including Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+. • 1f) Implement a focused prevention strategy to support young people who are under 16 and at risk of homelessness, supported by targeted investments. • 2. Prioritize prevention and early intervention efforts that provide assistance well before a young person experiences homelessness, as well as immediate access to housing when a young person does become homeless. Ensure all staff are appropriately trained to do this work. • 3c) Adopt an approach grounded in trauma-informed care, LGBTQ2S+ allyship, anti-oppression, cultural competency, and respect for the human rights of youth. • 3e) Employ equitable, evidence-based approaches to supporting youth with disabilities, addictions, or mental health issues. • 4. Collaborate with communities to create rapid care access pathways for homeless youth and their families with severe health and mental health needs. • 7. Implement a harm reduction approach within all services and supports delivered to youth at risk or experiencing homelessness, ensuring that staff are trained and supported to do this work. • 9. Support communities to implement harm reduction models that focus on reducing the risks or harmful effects associated with substance use and addictive or other behaviours that pose risks for youth. • 11. Ensure that all programs, services, supports, and interventions meet the needs of diverse youth experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S. **The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018**

	Youth Homelessness Serving Sector Recommendations: ● 2) Embed a focus on prevention, in alignment with the Roadmap, within the existing youth homelessness services and supports. As part of these efforts, existing agencies and organizations serving youth who are homeless should be supported to implement evidence-based prevention interventions for youth, including family mediation and reunification, systems navigation, rapid exits from homelessness, and supports that enable youth to remain in their communities and school. ● 5) Discriminate against youth on the basis of their identity or life experiences. Services must meet the needs of diverse youth experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous youth, racialized youth, newcomer youth, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+. ○ Provide ongoing training, education, and accountability measures for all staff on anti-oppression, cultural competency, trauma-informed care, LGBTQ2S+ allyship, and positive youth development approaches. ● 7) Ensure within every community, young people are able to access a continuum of supports and services that are guided by a 'harm reduction' philosophy whereby young people are able to choose from a range of supports (including abstinence only environments) based on their needs, desires, and where they are at. Staff in all services should be trained to support youth's self-determination with respect to their preferred supports, and all young people should be able to access high quality supports irrespective of their use of substances. ● 4) In reflecting on practice and programmatic responses to youth homelessness as articulated in the community-level strategy, community organizations should ensure prevention-based activities exist within the continuum of supports provided to youth. Government of Canada Recommendations: ● Identifying and advancing program interventions that focus specifically on intervening well before a young person experiences homelessness, and supporting youth to exit homelessness as rapidly as possible and in a sustainable way. ● The goal of this tool should be the early identification of homelessness risk amongst youth and their families, thus providing the opportunity to intervene before youth become homeless. **Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016**

	Communities and Municipalities Recommendations: ● 3.2 Communities should focus on prevention and strategies to move young people out of homelessness instead of expanding emergency services. ● 3.4 Community strategies should necessarily ensure that local and program responses take account of the needs of priority populations. ● 3.6 Make 'family reconnect' supports available to all young people who come into contact with the system. ● 3.9a) The need for all service providers to adopt a 'trauma informed care' approach and ensure all staff are trained and supported to do this work. ● 3.9b) Harm reduction programming and supports should be available to all young people who need it, and all staff should be trained and supported to do this work. ● 3.9d) Targeted approaches that are tailored to youth needs, such as rapid prevention responses for newly homeless youth and augmentative supports for youth transitioning out of homelessness. Government of Canada Recommendations: ● 1.1a) Community Planning: Designated communities should be supported to develop and implement plans to prevent and end youth homelessness embedded in systems of care with measurable targets for reducing the problem. ● 1.1b) Program interventions focusing specifically on prevention and moving youth out of homelessness as rapidly as possible (through Housing First for Youth, for instance). ● 2.2 c) More supports for families with children under 16. **A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow A Public Action Plan for the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations - 2018** ● 3. Increase cultural understanding and skills: ○ This will help ensure that all staff have the cultural awareness, understanding and skills necessary to better assist children and families. ● 5. Support the health and well-being of our communities: ○ This action will focus specific preventative programs to better support youth and families before and during involvement in the child intervention system. ● 6. Support self-determination and prevention and early intervention services: ○ This action will help develop partnerships with Indigenous communities and begin to address some of the inequities in child protection and early

	intervention services faced by Indigenous communities. ● 8. Increase supports for youth transitioning to adulthood: ○ This action will help support young people during the challenging transition of developing into healthy, successful adults. ● 18. Help families heal from trauma: ○ This action will foster healing and growth, and will repair existing relationships while offering healthy self-expression for people experiencing trauma. ● 22. Improve service delivery for children and youth with disabilities and their families: Strengthen service delivery for children and youth with disabilities – and their families – who are also receiving child intervention services to ensure they receive the necessary supports when they need them. ○ This action will support families with children and youth who have disabilities receive a continuum of services regardless of the challenges they face. ● 28. Improving prevention and early intervention supports: ○ This action will focus on addressing the root causes for child intervention involvement and support children, youth and families when they need it. **Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015** ● Enhance the capacity of communities and service providers to support family reunification initiatives. This will include providing training and development opportunities, sharing resources and promising practices, and increasing opportunities for information sharing, as well as developing a common understanding of family preservation and reunification. ● Develop comprehensive tools and resources for parents who are trying to resolve family conflict to keep their family unit together. ● Develop strategies and responses that reflect the unique needs of diverse youth, including Aboriginal people, immigrants and the LGBTQ community that are based on research and promising practices. ● Develop a common understanding of the unique causes of homelessness for these subpopulations, such as discrimination and inequality. ● Ensure youth leaving systems of care, such as: Child Intervention; Family Supports for Children with Disabilities; Justice; and Mental Health have been engaged in the development of comprehensive transition/ discharge plans that address housing, programming and education supports required for successful outcomes and healthy transitions.

	● Identify best practices and support communities to implement them. **<u>Local:</u>** **Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015** ● 2.4 Promotion of family reunification and supports ○ Youth and family members are supported to develop understandings of family dynamics and relationships, how to build supportive and healthy relationships, and development of conflict resolution and anger management skills. ○ Early counselling and mediation of family conflict, including 'cooling off' or respite services for youth, are readily available for early intervention and a return home when appropriate. ● 2.6 Effective supports for youth aging out of government care ○ Systems are in place for providing youth with life skills development, financial supports, psychological and emotional supports, access to education and employment, and health services before and during their transition from government care. ● 2.7 Zero discharge into homelessness ○ Discharge planning from systems is improved through collaboration with case managers to ensure transitions include permanent housing and long term supports. ○ Family mediation and conflict resolution are facilitated by youth serving agencies if youth need to leave home temporarily. ○ A Housing First approach offers proactive, immediate access to appropriate housing options. ● 5 Continuous support service and case management ○ Flexible and continuous case management and support services are available to establish meaningful relationships and help transition youth at their own pace. ○ Needs assessments are ongoing and adaptable to meet the changing needs of youth. ○ Long term supports, case management, and aftercare ensure successful outcomes. **Community Mental Health Action Plan - 2016** ● 3.1 Incorporate the social determinants of health, adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed practice into team-based approaches. ○ Ensure the complexity of client needs are addressed.

	● 4.1 Use existing evidence informed practices to develop and expand a network of navigators, or informal supports, available to individuals and their families/caregivers when a need is identified. ○ Engage those with lived experience in the system as volunteers/peers supports to assist with system navigation and as an informal support. ○ Intentionally involve caregivers, natural advocates, concerned co-workers, faith-based personnel and other potential supporters of clients in becoming familiar with, and promoting, available resources. ● 4.3 Develop practices that adapt to the diverse cultural and life circumstances of Indigenous people and newcomers. ● 5.1 Develop tactics to engage professionals within each stage of the continuum of care: awareness building, skill building, mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, early intervention, treatment and follow-up. **All in for youth Year 2 Evaluation: Final Report - 2018** ● Improve sensitivity to and respect for different cultures by integrating different cultural values into existing programming activities. ● Inform families, in a timely way, of agency staff turnover to help prepare students for these changes in their life. Losing connection to a trusted adult in their life can be a significant change if a student had a strong relationship with an agency staff member. **Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee - 2015** ● 4. Culturally specific resources for Aboriginal youth, who are overrepresented amongst homeless youth or youth at risk of homelessness. ● 5. Supportive and trained supports and services for LGBTQ+ youth, who are also over-represented in the homeless youth population. **The Rainbow Alliance for Youth of Edmonton - LGBTQ2S Survey Report - 2018** ● Strengthen individuals and families through the provision individual and family support / groups such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) groups, counselling, and social / recreation groups / peer support. **End Poverty in a Generation - A Road Map to Guide Our Journey - 2016** ● 3. City of Edmonton to complete a review of programs and services to better reflect the needs of Indigenous peoples

	and champion the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. **Edmonton Task Force on Community Safety – Reach Report - 2009** ● 6. Community neighbourhood organizing initiatives. Implement a new Neighbourhood Organizing Model in several diverse areas of Edmonton to activate community in support of a preventive approach to community safety.
Recommendation #3—Make a top priority implementation of collective data gathering and sharing among agencies through shared technology as a key enabler of collaboration through coordination of access, infrastructure and care, leading to a one-client/one-record-approach to service delivery. 12 recommendations, 9 reports	**<u>National:</u>** **The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018** Youth Homelessness Serving Sector Recommendations: ● 6) Through systems integration provide highly integrated, 'one-stop,' barrier-free services to youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, in collaboration with other systems and sectors. Rather than have a singular point of access, this integrated system should adopt a 'no wrong door' approach. Government of Canada Recommendations: ● Developing an evaluation framework for frontline services to assess their progress towards youth homelessness prevention. **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018** Government of Canada Recommendations: ● 5b) Information sharing agreements with youth-serving organizations to facilitate improved systems integration (where appropriate). ● 6. Seek to provide highly integrated, 'one-stop,' barrier-free services to youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, in collaboration with other systems and sectors. **Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016** Communities and Municipalities Recommendations: ● 3d) Use data for service integration and monitoring of progress. Government of Canada Recommendations:

	● 1.1d) Knowledge development and data management support specific to youth homelessness. **Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector - June 2019** ● 16) That the Government of Canada prioritize data about the charitable and non-profit sector in all Statistics Canada economic surveys, including the Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating; and that the Government of Canada support collaboration between Statistics Canada and the charitable and non-profit sector to determine what additional data could be collected and disseminated in a timely and consistent manner to support the evidence base for decisions by organizations in the sector. **A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow A Public Action Plan for the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations - 2018** ● 39. Better-informed decisions impacting children, youth and families: ○ This will provide necessary data and information on which to base program and policy decisions. **Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015** ● Develop a monitoring system to ensure modification of the tool, where appropriate. **<u>Local:</u>** **Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015** ● 1.1 Coordination of activities of youth serving agencies & systems partners ○ Collaborative planning processes, open and constant communication, and knowledge exchange are commonplace amongst agencies, systems, programs and facilities. ○ Appropriate supports and services are matched to meet the needs of youth **All in for youth Year 2 Evaluation: Final Report - 2018** ● Establish a set of school based procedures or guidelines to enable agency staff to connect a family to supports even if the agency staff is not in the school (e.g., establish notification procedures to alert agency staff of family support needs even if agency staff is not present in the school; email

	notification communication procedures). These guidelines will preclude wait times. **Community Mental Health Action Plan - 2016** ● 2.1 Improve information sharing across systems and agencies ○ Increase awareness and utilization of Alberta training for legislated information sharing (Alberta Human Services' Information Sharing Strategy).
Recommendation #4—Phase in coordinated access and infrastructure and coordinated care by strategically focusing on key areas to coordinate that are critical for launching the collaborative model such as access, intake, evaluation, and training, thereby effectively managing change to ensure success. 22 recommendations, 10 reports	**<u>National:</u>** **The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018** Youth Homelessness Serving Sector Recommendations: ● 4) Adopt a youth-focused, cross-systems assessment and screening tool that identifies, assesses, and responds to the needs of youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness by: ○ Prioritizing youth separately from adult prioritization within coordinated entry and collaborative planning tables to ensure timely interventions for youth. ○ Using this tool to identify youth at risk of homelessness early, thus providing the opportunity to intervene before a young person or their family become homeless. Municipal Governments and Communities Recommendations: ● 5) Implement a Duty to Assist, including through: ○ Coordination and delivery of services. ○ Alignment with coordinated access systems. ○ A communications strategy that ensures young people and adults are aware that assistance is available. ○ Working with mainstream services including education, child protection, health authorities, police, and the justice system to develop an integrated systems response to support Duty to assist. ○ Ensuring prevention-based interventions are in place to support the work. ○ Implementation and enforcement of quality assurance. **Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015** ● Develop a provincial needs/risk assessment tool with community organizations that builds from existing needs/risk

	assessment tools being used across Canada for programming related to youth homelessness. ● Develop a common understanding and use of this tool through training and information sharing, and support the implementation of the need/risk assessment tool across Alberta. ● Monitor and evaluate targeted responses for continuous improvement in serving subpopulations of youth. ● Monitor and evaluate harm reduction responses to encourage continuous improvement in serving vulnerable youth. ● Establish information sharing agreements with youth-serving organizations to facilitate the single point of entry support system. ● Develop innovative tools and strategies to better collect data on youth homelessness. ● Support the gathering and sharing of knowledge, research, expertise and successful service delivery practices across the province to link research to practice. **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018** Government of Canada Recommendations: ● 1h) Prioritize the development of broad-based assessment tools and strategies to determine risk of homelessness for youth, in partnership with provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments. ● 1b) Focus on clear and measurable outcomes, milestones, and criteria. ● 3a) Employ a standardized assessment tool to assist in determinations of homelessness risk for youth. ● 2b) Develop and employ a standardized assessment tool that can be used across systems to assist in determining homelessness risk for youth. **A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow A Public Action Plan for the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations - 2018** ● 38. Strengthen service delivery through ongoing program evaluation: Strengthen service delivery by evaluating programs and services and making sure health information necessary for program evaluation is available to evaluators. ○ This action will strengthen programs and service delivery and improve outcomes for children, youth and families.

	<u>Local:</u> **Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015** ● 1.2 Establish collective principles and values ○ All stakeholders incorporate shared principles and values into operational mandates. ○ Collective values provide a clear focus to guide actions, which ensures consistent messaging for youth across the system of care. ● 1.4 Coordinated research, data collection, information sharing and evaluation ○ Constant research on homelessness initiatives at the local, national and international levels produces new strategies and approaches to continually adapt the strategy. ○ Data collection enables a clearer picture of homeless populations/subpopulations through understanding of demographics, needs, and service efficacy. ○ Program evaluation and agreed upon measures of success enable effective resource allocations and can guide changes to existing programs to enhance success. **Movements of Change: An Evaluation of Year of the Enough for All Strategy - 2017** 1.F Adapt the evaluation framework to align to the revised Implementation plan as the indictors and outcomes are updated, the evaluation framework will need to be refreshed to ensure the outcomes can be measured with appropriate and reliable data sources. **Community Mental Health Action Plan - 2016** ● 7.3 Strengthen alignments with government and community partners committed to using evidence informed practices ○ Develop opportunities for sharing research and practice-based evidence to inform planning in. ● 9.1 Work towards community-based evaluation with shared outcome measures for success. ○ Develop the necessary tools to move forward from measuring change within individual organizations to measuring change in the broader community. ● 9.3 Develop a systemic process to synthesize and interpret data from shared measurements. **End Poverty in a Generation - A Road Map to Guide Our Journey - 2016**

	• 28. Develop a corporate tool with a poverty lens to inform decision making at the City. **Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee - 2015** • 2.The creation of an awareness campaign and icon indicating a staff or resource has received training on working with youth engaged in high-risk behaviours. The icon would convey to youth that this person or place has received training and education on the experiences and perspectives of youth engaged in high-risk behaviours. **Edmonton Task Force on Community Safety – Reach Report - 2009** • 9. An innovative evaluation framework to measure success.

Recommendation #5—Make a top priority engagement of vulnerable youth in the creation of a collaborative vulnerable youth services model including efforts to implement consistent youth-centred or client-directed care as well as efforts to improve communication with vulnerable youth as outlined in this report.
 	
14 recommendations,
 	
7 reports
	<u>National:</u>
	
	What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018
	
	Communities Recommendations:
	
	• 3. Foster meaningful youth engagement in the development of community policies and responses that affect youth at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness. Ensure the provision of necessary supports (reimbursement, compensation, accessibility, etc.) at all events, forums, and discussion groups.
	
	Government of Canada Recommendations:
	
	• 1i) Meaningfully involve young people with lived experience in the creation and monitoring of this Strategy, compensating them for their work.
	• 1g) Work with Indigenous communities to develop and implement a focused homelessness prevention strategy for Indigenous youth and their families, supported by targeted investments.
	• 3d) Mobilize the principles of youth voice, youth choice, and self-determination in their work with youth.
	• 7. Foster meaningful youth engagement in all provincial/territorial policy development, planning, and implementation processes that affect youth at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness. Ensure the provision of necessary supports (reimbursement, compensation, accessibility, etc.) at all events, forums, and discussion groups.
	• 12. Foster meaningful youth engagement in all policy development, planning, and implementation processes within the youth homelessness sector. Support all youth-serving agencies and organizations to establish Youth Advisory Boards. Ensure the provision of necessary supports to youth (reimbursement, compensation, accessibility, etc.) at all events, forums, and discussion groups.
	
	A Stronger, Safer Tomorrow A Public Action Plan for the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention's Final Recommendations - 2018
	
	• 2.3) A Youth Advisory Committee to provide the viewpoint of youth with lived experience.
	  ○ This action will help shape the implementation of the public action plan and ensure meaningful ongoing participation by Indigenous communities in strengthening the child intervention system
	• 14. Empower the voices of children, youth and families to drive continuous improvement:
	  ○ This action will give a stronger voice to those involved in the system and help them shape and improve all aspects of the child intervention system, including how foster care is delivered.
	
	The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018
	
	Government of Canada Recommendations:
	
	• Meaningfully involve people with lived experience of youth homelessness in the creation and monitoring of prevention-based efforts, compensating them for their work.
	
	Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016
	
	Communities and Municipalities Recommendations:
	
	• 3.10 Foster meaningful youth engagement in all policy development, planning and implementation processes.
	
	<u>Local:</u>
	
	Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015
	
	• 2.2 Youth engagement and resiliency strategies
	  ○ Youth are supported to reengage with education, recreation, and community activities.
	  ○ Providers promote development of protective factors including conflict resolution, life skills, problem solving, and anger management.

	End Poverty in a Generation - A Road Map to Guide Our Journey - 2016 • 6. Provide opportunities + supports to vulnerable populations to participate in City committees. • 10 Work with local Indigenous and refugee youth on an anti-racism public awareness and action campaign. **Edmonton Task Force on Community Safety – Reach Report - 2009** • 5. Models for engagement within Edmonton's Indigenous and multicultural communities.
Recommendation #6—Develop an innovative collaborative funding approach to obtain adequate and sustainable support for the collaborative vulnerable youth services model. 12 recommendations, 7 reports	**<u>National:</u>** **The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018** Municipal Governments and Communities Recommendations: • 1) Develop and implement a community-level strategy or plan to prevent and end youth homelessness with ambitious targets, aligned with complementary investment. Funders (Foundations, Community Entities) Recommendations: • 1) Increase comfort levels with funding pilot projects to not only contribute to a growing evidence base, but support innovative practice at the community level. To make the most of these pilots, funders should mandate precise evaluation. • 2) Provide program funding to service organizations for a minimum of three years to allow for concentrated program development, establishment of robust program evaluation and data measures, and adequate time to report on program successes. • 3) Develop granting streams that support activities across the Roadmap's prevention continuum, building a foundation for delivering and sustaining effective prevention-based practice. Government of Canada Recommendations: • Prioritizing investment in innovative, outcomes-based solutions to youth homelessness, drawing on international and domestic evidence-based approaches, practices, and policies. **Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016** Government of Canada Recommendations:

	• 2.1 a) Supporting community planning processes, including targeted funding for work on youth homelessness. • 2.2 b) Supporting communities to work with this population. **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018** Provincial/Territorial Departments and Ministries Responsible for Health Recommendations: • 1a) Invest in the provision of coordinated and integrated mental health and health supports and services at the community level, as outlined in Mental Health Care for Homeless Youth: A Proposal for Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Leadership, Coordination, and Targeted Investment. **Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015** • Support community-based organizations and municipalities to initiate community driven responses to address youth homelessness. **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action - 2015** • 66. We call upon the federal government to establish multiyear funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation, and establish a national network to share information and best practices. **<u>Local:</u>**. **Movements of Change: An Evaluation of Year of the Enough for All Strategy - 2017** • 3. Prioritize additional resources and support for collaboratives and working groups Invest time and strategic leadership efforts with collaboratives for planning, evaluation and strategy development. **Community Mental Health Action Plan - 2016** • 1.2 Incentivize collaboration ○ Discuss with funding partners the creation of special grants that can only be accessed through sectoral collaboration.
Recommendation #7—As part of the collaborative youth services model,	**<u>National:</u>** **What Would It Take? Youth Across Canada SpeakOut About Youth Homelessness Prevention - 2018**

develop plans to extend partnerships and build trust with other service providers, academic institutions, and collaborations in Edmonton as a way to further increase access to services for vulnerable youth, increase positive outcomes for vulnerable youth, and ensure the success of the collaborative model.
 	
12 recommendations,
 	
5 reports
	Communities Recommendations:
	
	• 2a) Engage provincial/territorial government systems (Child Welfare, Health, Education, Justice, and Income Supports) to ensure they understand and commit to their roles and responsibilities in addressing youth homelessness. These systems should adopt a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to supporting youth at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.
	• 2c) Promote strategic partnerships between youth-serving organizations and agencies, schools, health care providers, child protection services, law enforcement, and other institutions that interact with young people.
	
	Government of Canada Recommendations:
	
	• 4d) The promotion of strategic partnerships between youth-serving organizations and agencies, schools, health care providers, child protection services, law enforcement, and other institutions which interact with young people.
	• 8. Work with a range of sectors (e.g., healthcare, education) to dramatically increase public awareness of available services for young people who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. This should include efforts to ensure professionals in a range of positions (e.g., doctors, teachers, nurses, librarians) are aware of services and trained to connect young people to services. Efforts should seek to ensure every young person is aware of available supports and services in their community.
	
	Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness - 2015
	
	• Increase awareness of these resources through government and community service providers, websites and resource centres.
	• Strengthen connections between community organizations to ensure alignment of programming, shared resources and collaboration.
	• Establish a provincial youth homelessness learning community through existing partnerships to enable shared learning, success and promising practices and to support improved practice.
	
	The Road Map for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness - 2018
	
	Youth Homelessness Serving Sector Recommendations:
	
	• 1) Work with cross-systems stakeholders, municipalities, youth with lived experience, and other stakeholders to develop and implement regional and community-based plans to prevent and end youth homelessness. These plans should align with existing poverty reduction plans, as well as plans to end homelessness writ large, utilizing knowledge in the sector to ensure that the diverse needs of youth are met.
	• 8)Work with a range of sectors (e.g., healthcare, education) to dramatically increase public awareness of available services for young people who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. Efforts should seek to ensure every young person is aware of available supports and services in their community.
	
	Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey - 2016
	
	Government of Canada Recommendations:
	
	• 2.2d) Identifying inter-ministerial opportunities for collaboration (for instance, between education, child and family services, and health and justice).
	
	Communities and Municipalities Recommendations:
	
	• 3.9c) Local and regional health authorities should work with communities to ensure that all young people between 13-24 have access to necessary mental health and addictions supports.
	
	<u>Local:</u>
	
	Homeward Trust - Community Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in Edmonton - 2015
	
	• 2.3 Education and awareness campaigns
	  ○ Partnerships are developed between youth serving agencies and schools/educational programs for information sharing to inform youth of services and options available and ways to access services.
	  ○ Common messaging developed by youth serving agencies, systems and community promotes education for teachers, administration and youth on homelessness issues.

Centre Hope