

# Stronger Together

"PATHWAYS TO RECONCILIATION AND RENEWAL: STRENGTHENING  
COORDINATED ACCESS AND BUILDING A UNIFIED COMMUNITY  
RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS"

JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

*WHAT WE HEARD - HONOURING COMMUNITY VOICES*



BY TAMMY HANSEN



# Together...

We can end homelessness in Winnipeg



## Acknowledgements

The writer would like to acknowledge the strength and courage of the community members, agency leaders, and direct service workers who shared their stories. It takes great trust and vulnerability to open up about the challenges faced, and these stories are carried with the utmost care and respect. Their voices are at the heart of this report, and deep gratitude is extended for the opportunity to walk alongside them. Their resilience and wisdom guide this work and remain central to the journey it reflects.

Sincere gratitude is also extended to the funders who continue to support agencies doing vital work in the community. Their ongoing commitment to funding initiatives that address the needs of those facing homelessness is invaluable. This support enables agencies to provide essential services that make a real difference in people's lives. Their investment is a crucial part of the healing and progress being pursued, and their continued dedication is deeply appreciated.

The writer would like to acknowledge End Homelessness Winnipeg for the openness shown in walking this journey with a willingness to listen, learn, and grow. It takes humility and courage to hold space for hard truths and to reflect deeply on how to move forward in a good way. The organization's commitment to hearing the voices of the community and striving for meaningful change is an important step toward reconciliation and healing. Appreciation is extended for being part of this path.

## About the Writer

Tammy Hansen brings over 30 years of experience in the fields of addictions, mental health, and homelessness, with approximately half of that time spent learning from and working alongside the community in Winnipeg's North End. This community has been a profound influence and guiding force in shaping both her professional approach and personal commitments.

Through her business, Hansen Coaching and Consulting, she provides consultation and support to agencies and to staff who are overwhelmed, experiencing burnout, or impacted by vicarious trauma. More information is available at [www.hansencoachingandconsulting.ca](http://www.hansencoachingandconsulting.ca).

Tammy carries the spirit name *Binese Ikwe* (Thunder Bird Woman), meaning "One who brings messages of the Creator to the Earth." This name was gifted by an Elder and is held with deep humility and reverence. As a Christian settler, she acknowledges the painful impact of the church on Indigenous Peoples and is committed to reconciliation and the building of right relations.

In preparing this report, the writer seeks to walk alongside the community—honouring their voices, truths, and lived experiences with integrity. The name *Binese Ikwe* represents a call to bridge divides, support healing, and promote unity. This report is offered as a contribution to that work: grounded in respect, shaped by listening, and oriented toward community healing and reconciliation.

### **Indigenous Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk Nations. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

### **About the Full Journey of Discovery Report**

This report is offered back to the community and End Homelessness Winnipeg as a reflection of what was shared, learned, and witnessed. The intent was never to speak for others, but to honour their words, identify the gaps and barriers, and support a path forward grounded in healing and collaboration. Naatamooskawin and Coordinated Access (CA) will be used interchangeably in the writing of this report. End Homelessness Wpg (EHW) is used often by agencies when referring to CA, due to being a system within EHW.

The recommendations shared in this report reflect the experiences and perspectives of those working directly within the Coordinated Access (CA) system. They do not necessarily represent the views of the writer, EHW or the funder. These insights are based on how the system is being perceived in the community and may not fully reflect the internal operations or intentions of End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) or Coordinated Access. Where there are discrepancies between perception and reality, it signals a need for greater communication and clarity. The purpose of this report is not to assign blame, but to foster learning, dialogue, and meaningful improvement. Some of the recommendations may already be in practice or may have been initiated during this process prior to release of the report. Writer would like to acknowledge and celebrate changes made in a good way.

### **About the Summary Report**

This summary report offers a condensed overview of a comprehensive 75-page document that captured the insights, experiences, and recommendations of community members, service providers, and people with lived experience. While it does not include the full depth of quotes and detailed references found in the original report, its purpose is to provide a more accessible, high-level synthesis of key themes and community-driven recommendations. The intent is to support broader engagement and understanding by offering a professional, reader-friendly version that retains the integrity of what was shared, while making the information easier to navigate and apply.

**Generously Funded by:**

END HOMELESSNESS WINNIPEG



## **Statement from Jason Whitford, CEO, End Homelessness Winnipeg**

This Stronger Together report is an honest, courageous, and necessary offering. It is not just a reflection of challenges—it is a powerful guide to help us move forward in a good way, together.

I want to begin by acknowledging the care and integrity with which this work was undertaken. Our colleague approached the task with humility and deep respect, grounding the process in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. She did not seek to speak for others, but rather created space for truth-telling—centering the voices of those who live and work within the system every day.

We acknowledge the voices in this report who bravely shared their experiences—direct service workers, access point staff, individuals with lived and living experience, and community partners. Their frustration with Naatamooskakowin—Winnipeg’s Coordinated Access system—comes through with clarity and urgency. These truths must be heard, honoured, and acted upon.

As an Indigenous-led organization, we recognize that resources like Naatamooskakowin carry spirit. This system began with ceremony, with prayers and the offering of tobacco, and with the guidance of Elder Belinda Vandebroek, who gifted it its name—meaning "a place to come to for help, shelter, or resources." This sacred beginning reminds us that our work is more than policy or procedure—it is about relationship, spirit, and responsibility.

Let us honour that sacred foundation through annual ceremonies, feasting, and shared reflection. Let us call on the ancestors to guide our work as we celebrate the lessons of the past year and seek blessing for the road ahead.

This report arrives at a critical moment. While the framework of Coordinated Access is rooted in evidence and best practice, it must adapt to our local context, and it must serve people—not the other way around. We are committed to making it work—for the community, not just within it.

The feedback in this report is clear: communication must improve. Support to partners must deepen. We must be transparent about challenges, nimble in our response, and relentless in our advocacy. We must link Coordinated Access to the broader provincial strategy on encampments and emergency response. Housing triage without housing stock is a recipe for harm. As one participant put it, we are working in a failed system—until there is more housing.

The current housing crisis cannot be ignored. People are waiting a year or more for placement—many in crisis the entire time. That’s like running an emergency room with too few doctors while patients line the halls. We need more deeply affordable housing, more culturally safe supports, and more wraparound care—especially for those with high acuity and complex needs.

And yet, amid these struggles, there are signs of hope—warm handoffs, children laughing in safe spaces, sacred fires burning at agency doorsteps. These are not just stories; they are glimpses of what is possible when community-led, culturally grounded approaches are resourced and respected.

End Homelessness Winnipeg is committed to listening, to learning, and to leading change with humility. We are committed to working with community, not in isolation. We are committed to being an ally to those experiencing homelessness and to strengthening the capacity of the sector, not just managing it.

Stronger Together is not just a title. It is a belief we hold deeply. The lives behind the statistics matter. The stories in this report matter. The truths expressed here are not threats—they are invitations to do better, together.

Let us walk forward—with courage, compassion, and clarity of purpose.

Miigwetch.

Jason Whitford

CEO, End Homelessness Winnipeg

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## Introduction

Access to safe and stable housing is a fundamental human right, yet many individuals and families in Winnipeg remain without a place to call home due to a worsening housing crisis and a severe shortage of affordable units. Having a home is essential for dignity, safety, and well-being. Yet across Winnipeg, many continue to live in precarious, unsafe, or temporary conditions, often out of sight and disconnected from the supports they need. Winnipeg's response to homelessness is grounded in the Housing First approach, which prioritizes immediate access to housing as a foundation for recovery and stability. This approach, supported by culturally appropriate services and system-wide coordination, affirms that ending homelessness is about more than housing—it is about healing, equity, and community.



End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW), an Indigenous-led backbone organization, leads collective efforts to end homelessness through collaboration, meaningful consultation, and strong partnerships. Recognizing the over-representation of Indigenous peoples among those experiencing homelessness, EHW works with governments, community agencies, and stakeholders to align efforts and improve outcomes. Central to this work is the Coordinated Access system (CA), also known as Naatamooskadowin—a Cree term meaning “a place to come to for help, shelter, or resources.” launched on March 31, 2022. (End Homelessness Winnipeg, n.d.)

This is a summary of a report which represents a journey of discovery—an honest and open exploration of the gaps, challenges, and barriers that have emerged in the implementation of Coordinated Access. It also seeks to surface any harms that may have been caused—whether intentional or unintentional—as systems were built and decisions made. The purpose of this report is not only to identify what is not working but to offer a path toward healing, reconciliation, repair, and renewal. It is about holding space for difficult truths while also imagining and building a better future. The recommendations shared here are grounded in that spirit—an invitation to reset and rebuild the system with deeper care, accountability, and alignment with shared values.

EHW acknowledges that to move forward, they must be willing to name harms, to listen deeply, and to right the wrongs where they have occurred. This includes reflecting on how well Indigenous voice, knowledge and ways were honoured, how equity was upheld, and how responsive the system has been to those it is intended to serve.

Together, we can continue walking this path—not perfectly, but with purpose.

## Mapping the Journey: Listening, Learning, and Gathering Voices

Naatamooskadowin, Winnipeg's Coordinated Access system, is a federally mandated system required for communities receiving Reaching Home funding to streamline how people experiencing homelessness access housing and support services. Its goal is to create a more efficient, person-centered, and integrated approach by reducing duplication, improving collaboration among agencies, and using data systems to guide resource allocation. CA also emphasizes the importance of Indigenous leadership and involvement in its design and implementation. The creation was rooted in a recognition that no single organization or system can address homelessness alone. It called for a unified pathway that brings together service providers, government partners, and people with lived and living experience to streamline services, reduce duplication, and make access to housing and supports more effective and equitable.

As with any new initiative, especially one of this scale and ambition, the journey has not been without its challenges and growing pains. As one would set out with intention and hope, CA quickly encountered a landscape that was not

always easy to navigate—marked by well-trodden trails of past efforts, unexpected obstacles, and moments of friction and tension. These bumps along the path are not failures, but part of the learning process, reminding us of the complexity of the work and the need for ongoing reflection, adaptability, and humility.

The path to understanding the effectiveness of CA in Winnipeg began with a commitment to listen deeply and honour the voices of those most impacted. Rather than relying solely on traditional methods, this journey was grounded in relationships, respect, and reciprocity. Recognizing the historic and ongoing mistrust in system processes—and in response to feedback from the community—this process began with one-on-one interviews rather than a broad survey. Many shared that although their voices had been “consulted” in the past, they did not feel truly heard. A survey, at that stage, would have felt impersonal, cold, and potentially harmful. As such, writer made the decision to go to the community, face-to-face, to meet people where they are at.

Over the course of this journey, the report writer conducted in-person interviews and conversations with: Access Point agency staff, who work directly within the Coordinated Access system; Individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness, whose insights are critical to understanding the system’s impact; Coordinated Access, EHW and Reaching Home staff, whose perspectives offer operational and systems-level insight. These interviews were approached not as transactions but as relational encounters—opportunities to build trust, to hear stories, and to witness first-hand the impact of the system. This method honoured the need for safe, respectful spaces where participants could share openly, without fear of judgement or consequences.

A survey was offered at the end of the engagement process as an additional, optional way for individuals to share their experiences. This allowed space for those who preferred to respond in writing or who had not yet been reached through direct engagement.

At the heart of this phase of the journey was a clear intention: to hear people, not just consult them—to honour stories, name pain where it exists, and begin to create space for healing, reconciliation, and collective repair. This section of the report reflects the voices shared in that spirit, and the responsibility to carry those voices forward with care.

## Beginning in a Good Way

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Pathways to a Better Future: Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

*“The people for whom poverty is or has recently been an issue need to be drivers at the table, not just token spots if they’re there at all. No one knows the ins and outs, the gaps and strengths of services better than those who have to navigate them in the real world.” Participant, Community Conversation.*

Government of Manitoba (2019)

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At the beginning of this journey, it was important to start with humility, respect, and intention. Before any interviews were conducted or conversations began, the writer approached an Indigenous Elder, offering tobacco and asking for a blessing. This act acknowledged the sacredness of the work ahead, the importance of grounding the process in Indigenous ways of knowing, and the need to walk this path in a good way.

The offering of tobacco was a gesture of respect—an invitation for guidance, protection, and spiritual covering as writer entered spaces where trust had been broken, where harms had been felt, and where healing was needed. The blessing from the Elder helped to open the way for conversations to be approached with care, compassion, and cultural safety. Starting in this way was not a formality. It was an essential step in recognizing that this work takes place on Treaty 1 Territory and in the heart of the Métis Nation Homeland, and that any journey toward systems change and

reconciliation must begin with honouring Indigenous ways, leadership, and worldviews. This grounding in ceremony and relationship set the tone for what followed: a commitment to listen deeply, to reflect honestly, and to move forward with accountability, openness, and a willingness to unlearn and learn.

In preparing this report, the writer engaged with *Gathering a Bundle for Indigenous Evaluation* (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — Manitoba, 2018), a resource that reaffirms Indigenous ways of understanding learning, growth, and success. Rooted in Indigenous teachings and practices, it offers a holistic, relational, and strengths-based approach to evaluation—centering values such as generosity, reciprocity, and accountability. Consulting this Bundle was a way to honour those who have long led discovery and evaluation efforts within systems that primarily serve Indigenous peoples. It affirms the importance of reflecting Indigenous ways of knowing, being, feeling, and doing, and provides guidance for supporting individuals through connection, belonging, and identity.

As this report reflects the lived experiences of community within systems shaped by colonial history, the writer recommends *Gathering a Bundle for Indigenous Evaluation* as a guiding framework for End Homelessness Winnipeg and its partners—particularly during the repair phase and in future planning and evaluation. It offers a culturally grounded roadmap and reminds us, through the teaching of the turtle, that in times of conflict, the responsibility to restore harmony must be shared.

## Honouring Voices Through Published Works

Throughout this report, the writer references key documents that have shaped collective understanding of homelessness, housing need, and system coordination in Winnipeg. These works reflect the voices and lived experiences of individuals, agencies, and communities, and are included with intention—to honour what has been shared and ensure it is not forgotten or repeated without action. In the spirit of transparency and truth-telling, direct quotes are used where relevant. These documents, listed throughout the report and in the final section, serve as essential guides—grounding this work in truth, accountability, and the ongoing journey toward reconciliation and meaningful change.

## Honouring Voices by Including Direct Quotes

To honour the vulnerability and insight shared by participants, select direct quotes from interviews and surveys (used with permission and unidentifiable) are included throughout this report. These voices are presented intentionally to preserve meaning, uphold truth, and reflect lived and direct service experiences with respect and integrity. Notably, individuals with lived experience comprised 30% of all respondents, grounding this report in firsthand realities.

## Bringing Together Shared Commitments, Purpose and Path – Remembering “THE WHY”

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*“Why are we homeless in our own homeland?”*

(Connecting The Circle Coalition, 2019)

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At the core of meaningful systems change is collective action—a shared commitment to move forward together, even amid complexity. Early in this work, it became clear that understanding the visions, missions, mandates, and values of each organization involved in Coordinated Access was essential. Partners bring diverse perspectives—grounded in housing, mental health, addictions, cultural healing, harm reduction, and more—yet a common thread emerged: a commitment to the dignity, safety, and well-being of those experiencing homelessness. This section honours the guiding principles of participating organizations, not to flatten their diversity, but to highlight shared values such as equity, reconciliation, compassion, and housing as a human right. These commonalities offer a foundation for collaboration, anchoring efforts when challenges arise. To reflect this unity, the writer reviewed agency websites and

foundational statements, synthesizing these into a collective expression of purpose. While each agency offers a unique lens, the consistent themes—dignity, justice, harm reduction, and community-led change—underscore a united vision: that everyone deserves a home, and no one should be left behind.

## Collective Mission, Vision, Mandate, and Values

We are united in the mission to prevent and end homelessness in Winnipeg by walking alongside individuals, families, and communities, recognizing housing as the foundation for dignity and well-being. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and inclusive of diverse cultures, we offer culturally responsive, healing-centered supports that promote belonging and self-determination. Our shared vision is a city where everyone has a safe home, meaningful connections, and the support needed to live with dignity. Through collaboration, advocacy, and trauma-informed care, we commit to equity, justice, and reconciliation, guided by lived experience and a belief in housing as a human right.

## Walking the Path: Gathering Stories and Uncovering Themes

As writer journeyed from one community agency to another, and listened carefully to the voices of those navigating this system, their stories painted a picture of both hope and hardship. Along the way, several key themes emerged. Winnipeg’s community is at a crossroads. Divisions have deepened, and trust in End Homelessness Winnipeg and Naatamooskakowin Winnipeg’s Coordinated Access system has been fractured. Yet, within this challenge lies an opportunity—a chance to listen, to learn, and to rebuild. Together, we are embarking on a journey of discovery to better understand the challenges, barriers, and gaps within Coordinated Access. This process is not just about identifying what isn’t working; it is about resetting, repairing, and reimagining a system that truly reflects the diverse needs, experiences, and wisdom of our community.



### Summary of Challenges

As with any journey, the path toward a more coordinated, compassionate, and effective housing system has not been without its barriers. Along the way, several key challenges emerged—some anticipated, others less visible at the outset. These obstacles are not signs of failure, but opportunities for reflection, repair, and renewal.

- **Lack of Affordable Housing:** Long waitlists, few available units, and placement backlogs keep many in limbo.
- **Erosion of Trust:** Concerns over transparency, follow-through, and broken commitments have deepened division.
- **Unclear Roles & Communication Gaps:** Misaligned expectations and confusion due to lack of clarity in responsibilities across agencies and within Coordinated Access (CA) and End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW).
- **Under-Resourced Sector:** Staff are overwhelmed, underfunded, and often lack adequate training for complex needs.
- **HIFIS Technical Issues:** Data inaccuracies and user accessibility problems hinder coordination and trust.
- **Inconsistent Implementation:** Uneven resource allocation and unclear roles highlight a gap between vision and action.
- **Strained relationships:** Tensions between EHW/CA staff and service providers challenge collaboration.

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#### Quote from an EHW staff

*“We must go in with the intent to repair and not be right, and let go of the urge to defend. Be open to hearing.”*

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## Seeing the Impacts

Throughout this journey, it was important to not only hear the voices of community and service providers but also to SEE the impacts of their work firsthand. During a visit to one agency, writer approached the building just as a staff held the door open for a mother and her young child as they stepped outside. The child, smiling and dragging a small toboggan behind them, this caught my attention. In that moment, I smiled too—witnessing a small yet powerful sign of connection and care.

Inside the agency, during a tour, writer met with staff members and was welcomed into their world. One moment stood out—a small child smiled brightly, giggled, and approached writer with their stuffed animal, eager to engage. Writer paused to respond to them. That brief encounter struck writer deeply. It was clear that this child felt safe and secure. They had the courage to reach out, to play, and to connect. It was -40°C outside that day, but this child was barefoot, warm, and safe—inside a place that was providing them housing with dignity and care. I couldn't help but reflect—where would this child be without this program?

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### **Public Education Series, A Human Rights-based Approach to Supporting People Living Unsheltered in Winnipeg**

In 2016, a 53-year-old woman was found dead in the 300 block of Portage Avenue after a night when temperatures dropped to a freezing -32°C. Hours earlier, firefighters responded to the same block after a call regarding “multiple people that were frozen” but could only locate one individual that night.

Main Street Project. (2024)

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In another agency visit, the realities of homelessness and addiction were present and visible. Writer witnessed staff compassionately engaging with individuals impacted by substance use, walking alongside them with patience and respect. A sacred fire was burning, and members of the community gathered around it—participating in healing and ceremony. It was a powerful image of values in action: culture, connection, and commitment.

What stood out was meeting direct service workers—the true driving force and change makers. They shared their stories of struggle and resilience, of what brought them into this field and what keeps them here. Many spoke about the toll broken systems have had on their own health and mental well-being, but their unwavering dedication to serving others was deeply moving. They stay for the people. They stay to give hope. These moments are not just anecdotes. They are evidence of impact, of transformation, and of what's possible when community-driven, culturally grounded, and person-centered approaches are supported and resourced. They are reminders of why this work matters.

## A Closer Look- Taking a Deeper Dive into Community Perspective

After mapping the broad terrain—the major challenges, tensions, and system-level barriers—it's time to pause and take a closer look. This section of the report zooms in on the finer details, offering a deeper understanding of the recurring themes, patterns, and pain points that emerged through interviews, conversations, and surveys. Here, we walk alongside those who are navigating Coordinated Access every day—their stories and insights reveal the heart of the system: where it's working, where it's breaking down, and where healing is needed.

The feedback gathered for this report reflects a deep appreciation for being included and approached directly, with many valuing the opportunity to have their perspectives heard in a meaningful way. Some respondents expressed hope and willingness to contribute, acknowledging the importance of the initiative and the potential impact of Naatamooskadowin. However, alongside this appreciation was a clear sense of frustration and fatigue. Multiple individuals voiced concerns that previous opportunities to provide feedback did not lead to visible changes or follow-up. For some, this current effort feels like a final attempt to be heard after repeated disappointments. There is also

concern that while the CA may have once been a strong foundation, it is now perceived by some as ineffective and burdensome, especially when participants are waiting up to a year for housing. Overall, the responses highlight both a strong desire to contribute and a need for trust to be rebuilt through tangible action, transparency, and responsiveness moving forward.

Every effort was made to organize the insights and feedback gathered throughout this journey into clear and meaningful themes. However, as with any complex, community-based initiative, many of the issues, experiences, and reflections are interconnected. Some feedback naturally spans multiple themes and could reasonably be included in more than one section. In those cases, decisions were made to place them where they aligned most closely, while still acknowledging the broader systemic context in which they exist. This reflects the reality that the journey through Coordinated Access is not linear, and the challenges—and opportunities—are often woven together.

By assessing the system through trauma-informed principles, gaps become clearer. If people do not feel safe, heard, or empowered, the system is failing in those areas. Where there is transparency, collaboration, and choice, the system is succeeding. According to the majority of those interviewed CA is much needed and a wanted system but its implementation is failing. While many continue to support the vision, feedback indicates that the original spirit of the initiative has been lost. Respondents consistently expressed concern over a widening disconnect between the system's intended purpose and the lived reality of its implementation. The process was described as top-down, with early consultations perceived as tokenistic—more instructive than inclusive.

A key theme was the imbalance of power: rather than feeling like true partners, several agencies described their relationship with End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) as hierarchical, with unclear roles and limited space for shared decision-making. Communication breakdowns, lack of ground-level coordination, and punitive responses to mistakes have left many direct service workers feeling unsupported and devalued. Training was often unavailable when needed, and timelines within Naatamooskakowin were seen as rigid and misaligned with real-world needs.

The HIFIS system and VI-SPDAT tool also came under scrutiny. Agencies expressed frustration that these tools are outdated, burdensome, and enforced in ways that do not reflect sector input or realities on the ground. Despite the collaborative language used by EHW, respondents reported being pressured to sit on multiple committees with limited capacity or meaningful influence.

Ultimately, this feedback underscores a call for meaningful systems change—one that returns to the person-centered principles of respect, inclusion, and shared leadership. Agencies are willing to engage, but they seek a reset in approach: one rooted in humility, mutual accountability, and support for those doing the work in community. Addressing failures requires listening to those affected and making tangible changes.

### **Community General Statements:**

- *This survey is arguably the most meaningful opportunity to provide feedback that I've had so far. That being said, I have participated in every other survey only to see my concerns not addressed.*
- *The goal is admirable but this process needs revision.*
- *The "spirit" behind CA has been lost.*
- *There seems to be a disconnect between perception and reality.*
- *I want CA to be my ally in the work; I don't want them to go away. We need to invest in finding a way forward.*
- *Connect with Iain De Jong to set up a better CA system. <https://www.orgcode.com/>.*

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We align with End Homelessness Winnipeg in recognizing the importance of collecting data about homelessness through a coordinated access system to help evaluate and plan for improved service delivery and to measure progress. We encourage all organizations who deliver services to people experiencing homelessness to be active participants in this coordinated data system. We also call for supports to these organizations in recognition of the time and resources required to participate.

(Connecting The Circle Coalition, 2019)

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## 1. Biggest Challenge: Urgency of Housing

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While Coordinated Access (CA) is essential for organizing housing pathways, many of the most urgent challenges—especially the severe lack of affordable, appropriate housing—are beyond its control. This housing shortage has left people waiting months for placements, often retraumatized by a process with no real options. Service providers feel disheartened and powerless, working in a system they describe as "failed" without more housing.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Increase Housing Supply** - CA cannot succeed without more affordable, low-barrier housing. EHW is urged to take a leadership role in advocating for investment in housing and supports.
- **Focus on Low-Barrier Housing** - More housing options are needed for individuals facing substance use or other barriers, as many cannot even begin the housing process without suitable placements.
- **Ensure Equity for Marginalized Groups** - Newcomers, women, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals often face exclusion, safety concerns, and discrimination. The community calls for inclusive, affirming housing solutions that reflect their unique needs.

### Lack of Housing Statements:

- *There is no housing and there are more needs in community then even a few years ago.*
- *There is a housing crisis now, so even having a conversation with someone knowing this feels shitty because it feels like we are setting them up. We continue to retraumatize folks. When they need housing, it is NOW and not in months.*
- *If there are no housing available and enough spots in programs, why are we doing this? We are perpetuating the problem and it doesn't feel good.*
- *No homes to house people. So, to be honest we are all working in a failed system...until there is more housing!*

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### Media Quote

“Jason Whitford CEO of End Homelessness Winnipeg, emphasized that more work is needed to ensure housing accessibility and affordability for all. “There’s still a lot of work to do to close the gaps and make housing more accessible and affordable. We will keep working and engaging with the City. We will keep engaging with the Province, the business community, and our sector and Indigenous partners to ensure these investments continue to create lasting housing solutions for the people warm handoff need them most.” In addition to expanding the supply of affordable housing, a long-term commitment to policy improvements, increased funding, reviewed rental subsidies, and wraparound support services is essential to creating meaningful change for individuals and families in need of housing stability. End Homelessness Winnipeg will continue to advocate for collaborative solutions that address both immediate housing needs and the root causes of homelessness, ensuring that more people can access and maintain safe, stable housing.”

<https://endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/end-homelessness-winnipeg-applauds-winnipegs-housing-accelerator-fund-for-expanding-affordable-housing/>

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## 2. Long Waitlists and Delays

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The 12–14 month waitlist for CA has become one of the most significant barriers to housing. Service providers and community members describe it as harmful, particularly for high-needs individuals who are left without support during critical periods. The situation is made worse by: poor communication and delays in matching; under-resourced agencies and staff shortages; lack of long-term supports for landlords, mental health services, and emergency shelter; ethical concerns about conducting assessments with no timely outcome or follow-up and erosion of trust in the system, as individuals deteriorate while waiting.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Expand Housing Access** – Reserve units for CA participants; dedicate units to Housing First; advocate to raise EIA rent rates; and maintain existing housing to reduce vacancies.
- **Strengthen Accountability** – Conduct bi-weekly check-ins with waitlisted individuals to monitor needs.
- **Offer Skill-Building** – Provide life skills workshops (e.g., budgeting, resumes, self-advocacy) during wait times.
- **Diversify and Reassess** – Create alternate service pathways and update assessments to reflect current needs.
- **Speed Up Matching** – Hire more staff and improve coordination to reduce delays in housing placements.

### Long Waitlists Statements:

- *End Homelessness Winnipeg is amazing. But Coordinated Access is not what it used to be, as the process now takes a 12 to 14 months before community members see any kind of support.*
- *The bottleneck is with EHW and not community, meantime we provide support. We don't want to leave people hanging.*
- *List is not moving especially for women and queer folks.*
- *It feels unethical to do a sharing experience with someone only to put them on a waitlist that would result in them not receiving services for many months. Sometimes the wait is so long that they have declined significantly in that time and or CA asks for an updated sharing experience*
- *CA results suck. The waitlist is ridiculous, there is no participant follow-up*

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## 3. Communication and Coordination Challenges

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Community members report that End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) and Coordinated Access (CA) are experiencing serious challenges with communication, transparency, and coordination—leaving the CA system feeling ineffective and unaccountable. Reported concerns include confusion about roles, funding decisions, and referral processes; poor follow-up on participant files and unclear eligibility; high staff turnover, limited knowledge transfer, and understaffed agencies; Community of Practice (CoP) meetings seen as unhelpful or lacking value; limited participation from Indigenous-funded agencies, which contributes to fragmented data; and a widespread sense that community feedback is often ignored or goes unacknowledged.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Improve Communication** - Update and share clear guides and contact lists; define staff roles, timelines, and communication protocols; respond consistently and keep providers informed.
- **Strengthen Leadership Tables**- Use them to address systemic issues like data sharing and equity; ensure diverse voices are included and feedback is acted upon.

- **Revitalize CoP Meetings** - Focus on problem-solving, training, and peer learning; host at different agencies to build sector-wide relationships.
- **Increase Visibility and Trust** - have CA staff regularly engage with direct service teams at shelters and hubs; build stronger relationships through presence and collaboration.

**Communication and Coordination Statements:**

- *Naatamooskakowin needs to offer training in objective documentation, they also need to follow their own advice.*
- *Perhaps a one pager outlining the process and appropriate contacts would be helpful for service providers.*
- *Our ideas aren't received. We are trying to innovate but are told we can't, or we've tried that before, or this is just the way it is.*
- *The policy and procedure guide needs to be updated with current terms, definitions, and procedures. I would like to see implementing a standardized onboarding training guide for all Naatamooskakowin partner organizations to ensure consistency and efficiency*
- *Have a regular presence at shelters, access center, agencies*
- *At networking tables provide some training, learning about programs, wellness, and what we can take back to community to do better. This needs to be built in.*

## 4. Breakdown of Trust and Division

Community service providers report a serious breakdown of trust with CA and EHW, citing experiences of disrespect, poor communication, and power imbalances—such as being yelled at, dismissed, or devalued, with feedback often ignored and fears of retaliation for speaking up. Some described cold or aggressive communication, even in sensitive situations, and decisions made without understanding direct service realities. Ongoing issues like poor coordination, limited training, and mismanaged meetings have further eroded trust. At the same time, it was also reported that some CA and EHW staff have been supportive and helpful, and where strong relationships exist, they are highly valued.

**Community Recommendations:**

- **Acknowledge Harm** - Name and apologize for past harms and commit to better relationships.
- **Be Present** - Spend time with agencies to build understanding and connection.
- **Create Safe Dialogue** - Foster spaces where feedback is welcomed without fear.
- **Address Power Imbalances** - Shift from top-down directives to respectful, collaborative communication.
- **Value Direct Service Expertise** - Respect and include direct service staff perspectives.
- **Respect Capacity** - Be mindful of workloads, give proper notice, and value community knowledge.
- **Celebrate Wins** - Recognize agency efforts to rebuild morale.
- **Advocate for Community** - Use leadership roles to remove barriers and support direct service work.

**Breakdown of Trust and Division Statements:**

- *I have given feedback and recommendations and those have been ignored and is frustrating.*
- *The evaluation report wasn't released for a long time and it wasn't accurate.*
- *I was offered to give feedback in a survey (1 year ago), I would have preferred a face to face sit down.*
- *We are hesitant to expression concerns for fear of retribution.*
- *Being more of a partner with organizations rather than telling organizations what they should do.*
- *Advocate for us, be involved in our work, come in person to the agency. Build trust and relationship with each team member.*

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## 5. Training Gaps and Capacity Challenges

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Community agencies shared strong concerns about inconsistent training and lack of staff preparedness within Coordinated Access (CA) and the broader housing system. While some training offered by EHW was described as helpful, overall delivery was seen as inconsistent, outdated, and disconnected from direct service realities. High staff turnover—especially within EHW—has made it difficult to maintain knowledge and onboarding, leaving new staff unprepared and leading to miscommunication, unclear roles, and harmful interactions. Agencies reported that some CA staff lacked key skills in trauma-informed care, critical thinking, and cultural safety, which has resulted in unsafe housing decisions and inappropriate participant labels. The community stressed the need for training that is consistent, relevant, culturally grounded, and accessible to all staff working with participants.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Develop Consistent Onboarding** – Create a standardized onboarding process for CA and partner staff covering Housing First, HIFIS, trauma-informed care, Indigenous histories, confidentiality, and the CA model.
- **Offer Flexible Training Options** – Provide online, self-paced modules and blended formats. Include regular refreshers to reflect changes in the system and best practices.
- **Keep Content Relevant and Practical** – Update training regularly with input from direct service staff to ensure it reflects current realities and is applicable in day-to-day work.
- **Use CA Meetings for Learning** – Incorporate skill-building topics into regular CA meetings, such as mental health, Indigenous teachings, de-escalation, and effective communication.
- **Improve Matching and Coordination Skills** – Train staff on clinical considerations in housing placement, respectful and objective documentation, and understanding complex behaviours.
- **Clarify Roles and Ethics** – Provide training on professional boundaries, respectful collaboration, and accountability.
- **Incorporate Community and Cultural Knowledge** – Engage experienced direct service workers and Elders in training development and delivery. Use regular feedback to strengthen offerings.
- **Strengthen Data Practices** – Train staff on privacy, consent, and file handling. Keep Resource Sharing Agreements current and ensure agency contact information is regularly updated.
- **Host Learning and Networking Events** – Organize community gatherings to share knowledge, build relationships, and support collaboration.

### Training Gaps and Capacity Statements:

- *Staff are not trained properly, or don't understand the roles they play in finding housing.*
- *Unequipped staff in the roles (lack communication and critical thinking and executive functioning skills).*
- *Train people how to write objectively, respectfully.*
- *Train people to have good critical thinking skills.*
- *Have an online training feature.*
- *Have a community gathering, community info sharing*

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## 6. Burden on Sector and Workload

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The homelessness-serving sector is facing critical strain. Direct service workers are managing rising caseloads, increasing participant complexity, and CA responsibilities—often without additional funding or clear role definitions. Staff report feeling overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted, and unsupported. Many are expected to provide follow-up and ongoing support without the time, resources, or clarity to do so. Burnout and turnover are high, leaving agencies

scrambling to fill gaps and participants experiencing inconsistent support. Despite best efforts, the system lacks the infrastructure to meet current demands, and direct service workers feel the weight of doing more with less.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Fund Dedicated CA Roles** - Create funded CA positions in agencies to relieve staff pressure. Consider embedding CA staff with dual supervision.
- **Stabilize and Grow the Workforce** - Increase staffing levels across the sector to reflect the scale and complexity of the work. Strengthen recruitment and retention through incentives and equitable resource distribution.
- **Support Manageable Caseloads** - Set sector-wide caseload standards (e.g., 1:10). Fund extra staffing for high-risk work.
- **Center Wellness and Collective Care** - Integrate staff wellness supports into program design—such as debrief time, peer circles, mental health access, and confidential supports to address burnout and vicarious trauma.
- **Strengthen Communication and Accountability** - Improve two-way feedback between EHW, CA, and agencies. Co-create shared accountability practices.
- **Clarify CA Roles and Follow-Up** - Clearly define light-touch support expectations. Assign dedicated navigators for post-story-sharing tasks.
- **Promote System Accountability** - Conduct a system workload review. Create a public “You Said, We Did” tool to show responsiveness.
- **Invest in Access Point Infrastructure** - Fund drop-in hubs with extended hours. Provide support for agencies onboarding as access points to prevent overload.

### Burden on the Sector and Workload Statements:

- *Personally, I feel like systems are one of the quickest routes to burnout, Naatamooskakowin is a great contributor for me.*
- *Not enough support provided to agencies, have to do work on top of full-time job.*
- *Over time we are impacted by broken systems and we get tired. When things don't change, we can feel hopeless. When we have given opinions, it has fallen on deaf ears, or that is our perception anyway. I have not spoken up due to fear of consequences (power) and we are stuck in complaining, I understand this can contribute to toxic environment.*
- *Sector is tired, overworked and stretched to the max.*
- *Staff feel burdened by broken systems, doing the CA system when there is no house feels awful. The impacts on staff mental and emotional health aren't good. They have direct relationships with the people this is impacting.*
- *We have lost staff due to stress with CA requirements.*
- *Staff haven't recovered from COVID, they are burned out. There is a housing crisis and a staff crisis.*

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## 7. Sharing Stories and Matches

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The current intake and story-sharing processes are widely experienced as invasive, retraumatizing, and inefficient. Participants often feel disrespected when repeatedly asked deeply personal questions in ways that lack trauma-informed care. This has, in some cases, led to worsening mental health, increased substance use, and heightened vulnerability to violence. The heavy reliance on self-disclosure—without the option to supplement with staff insights or collateral information—frequently results in inaccurate assessments and missed opportunities to connect high-need individuals to appropriate supports. The system lacks flexibility for people with cognitive, language, or mental health barriers, and offers few outreach-based options. Tools like the SPDAT are widely seen as colonial, culturally unsafe, and inadequate for capturing complex needs. Miscommunication and inconsistent follow-up—especially without warm

handoffs—leave many participants unsupported and increase strain on direct service workers. The new PATH intake process offers promise. Early feedback suggests it is more trauma-informed, accurate, and culturally responsive, with potential to reduce harm, build trust, and ease system burdens if expanded thoughtfully.

- **Improve Access:** Provide mobile, low-barrier, and culturally safe intake options that reflect diverse needs.
- **Simplify and Streamline Intake** - Make sharing optional, respectful, and based on trust. Use collateral info and staff observations when needed. Focus assessments on urgency, update info regularly, and assign interim supports like ICM while waiting for ACT.
- **Fund Warm Handoffs:** Support dedicated roles for transitions, follow-up, and transportation.
- **Boost Coordination:** Enable real-time tracking, shared assessments, and better cross-agency communication.
- **Fix Matching:** Prioritize need over order, start intake at first contact, and prevent high-needs participants from falling behind.

### Sharing Story and Matches Statements:

- *Sharing story process can be harmful, we have seen more violence, increase and drug use and attempted suicide after sharing stories.*
- *There is a misconception that the sharing experience is a straight path to housing with no wait times. I have had to manage expectations multiple times as there has been people mis informing the process to the client making their expectations very misguided.*
- *SPDAT is a terrible tool, it's colonial and not safe ore respectful.*
- *Sector wants to be able to fill in gaps in sharing stories where participants forget, especially when in psychosis, they aren't in a good state of mind to give factual and accurate information. Staff that know the participant and have observed them over years can fill in gaps.*
- *We would like to pool conversations with other agencies, feels better to allow anyone doing the sharing conversation to input, this is more person centered and trauma informed.*
- *When we have a different situation come up, we want to be able to call someone to discuss it, not every participant fits into the same box.*

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## 8. Homeless Individuals and Families Information (HIFIS)

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Feedback on HIFIS reveals widespread frustration. While some value it as a shared database, most direct service staff find it difficult, time-consuming, and not designed for effective case management. Frequent system changes without proper training leave users overwhelmed. Limited data-sharing means participants must often repeat their stories, causing retraumatization and inefficiencies. Some agencies have created internal tools to ease the burden, but these innovations are often dismissed. A lack of system transparency, inconsistent usage (notably by agencies exempt from HIFIS), and concerns about data control and sovereignty further erode trust. Communities call for a more user-friendly, equitable, and collaborative system that supports real-time care coordination and respects local knowledge.

### Community Recommendations:

- **Invest in a User-Friendly, Purpose-Built System:** Improve HIFIS usability or explore alternative systems that support real-time, direct service coordination. Include centralized tools for tracking and seamless transitions.
- **Standardize Training and Provide Ongoing Support:** Develop consistent, accessible training modules with dedicated time for staff to stay updated. Create responsive help desks for technical and case-specific support.

- **Ensure Equitable and Consistent Use Across Agencies:** Clarify who is required to use HIFIS and enforce consistent participation, including exempt organizations, to build trust and system credibility.
- **Enable Shared, Consent-Based Data Access:** Move beyond upload-only models to allow agencies to view and update participant data collaboratively, reducing duplication and repeated storytelling.
- **Support Community-Driven Innovations:** Recognize and integrate local data tools that ease administrative burdens. Encourage collaboration and adapt system design based on user feedback.
- **Promote Transparency and Data Sovereignty:** Clearly communicate system limitations and possibilities. Involve communities in governance, interpretation, and application of their own data.

#### HIFIS Statements:

- *HIFIS is a nightmare to navigate which can cause delays in our day to day*
- *We all hate HIFIS, info goes into a blackhole. We need more training on how to do it properly.*
- *A data base was created by community agencies to be able to coordinate with HIFIS but uploading (not downloading) info to integrate case management. This would take some of the paperwork burden off agencies. This is not breaching privacy as it's an upload only.*
- *Explore solutions around HIFIS and connecting to existing to make work lighter. If it can't be done it needs to be communicated why.*
- *There are constant changes with HIFIS, no one has the time to learn, this feels like it could be a full time job just to stay on top of everything. We also have to ensure staff are inputting everything correctly.*
- *I love HIFIS, one of the main indicators in the ending of homelessness in any community is a shared data base.*
- *It's barrier that we can't see progress of a participant that started with another organization. Then they come to us and have to start over. We always have to go through CA staff.*
- *Data sovereignty!*

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## 9. Accountability

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Community members feel there is a serious lack of accountability and transparency within CA. There is skepticism about evaluations, with some feedback suggesting they were inaccurate or did not reflect the realities. Participants also reported withholding honest responses on surveys due to fear, distrust, or a belief that their feedback wouldn't lead to real change. Concerns were raised about the absence of regular, meaningful opportunities for feedback. People want to know what mechanisms exist for submitting input and whether that input actually informs improvements.

To rebuild trust, community voices called for the development of regular, externally supported surveys and feedback loops. They also emphasized the need for a safe, trusted individual or mechanism to ensure CA leadership is held accountable—someone who will “hold their feet to the fire” and ensure transparency, responsiveness, and community voice in system improvement.

#### Community Recommendations:

- **Gather Honest Feedback:** Conduct regular, anonymous surveys through neutral third parties, and report back on actions taken.
- **Create Safe Feedback Channels:** Appoint a trusted liaison to collect concerns without fear of judgment.
- **Show Impact of Feedback:** Link community input to visible changes, and explain when feedback cannot be implemented.

## Accountability Statements:

- *There is no accountability.*
  - *Evaluation the went out wasn't accurate*
  - *People reported not being honest on surveys because of fear, and because they weren't sure it even mattered, feedback is received and change doesn't happen.*
  - *What is in place so that regular feedback can come in?*
  - *We need a person we feel safe with to hold them accountable.*
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## *Additional Comments for Focus*

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Community members identified cultural and systemic gaps within CA that hinder its inclusivity and effectiveness. Key issues include a lack of culturally safe care for Two Spirit and gender diverse individuals, the need for Indigenous interpreters, and limited newcomer inclusion in decision-making. There were also calls for better support for people transitioning from prison or addiction programs. Concerns were raised about EHW's limited direct service experience, which may disconnect them from the realities of homelessness. Many stressed that the biggest barriers to ending homelessness stem from systemic and government failures beyond CA's control. Broader economic pressures, broken political promises, inconsistent funding, and poor coordination across government systems further compound the issue. Without structural reforms in housing, income, and poverty reduction, CA's efforts risk falling short, leaving frontline workers to absorb the consequences.

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Public Education Series, A Human Rights-based Approach to Supporting People Living Unsheltered in Winnipeg

### **"Social Change Takes All of Us"**

Main Street Project. (2024)

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## Bridging the Gaps: Recommendations for Smoother Trails

One truth stood out: before moving forward, EHW/CA must acknowledge past harm and commit to doing better. Trust cannot be rebuilt through policy alone—it starts with relationship repair. A public apology and a sharing circle led by an Elder are recommended first steps toward healing. Grounded in humility and culture, this can restore trust and open space for co-creating a system rooted in respect, equity, collaboration, and love.

In closing, this report is rooted in the principles of reconciliation, justice, and deep relational accountability. It bears witness to the voices of community members, service providers, and those with lived experience, all of whom have bravely spoken truth. The work ahead requires not only systems change, but a transformation in how we walk alongside one another—with humility, courage, and care. The writer gratefully acknowledges Dr. Vikki Reynolds, whose powerful work on justice-doing and collective care has deeply influenced the spirit of this report. Her insights remind us that burnout stems not from personal weakness, but from witnessing and working within unjust systems—and that true sustainability lies in collective care grounded in solidarity. Let us commit—TOGETHER—to solidarity, dignity, and justice, walking forward with hope and shared purpose.

Collectively, community and EHW/CA can build a responsive system with clear roles, open dialogue, strong connections, and space to grow. The path won't be perfect—but it must be walked together.

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