

LETHBRIDGE

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Executive Summary - Needs Assessment Report

City of Lethbridge

Community Social Development

APRIL 2019



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CONTEXT

Community Social Development (CSD) has embarked on a comprehensive process to create a CSD Strategic Plan, and update the City of Lethbridge's Social Policy based on the social wellbeing needs of the community.

This Needs Assessment Report presents a review of relevant social and economic data; local agencies, partnerships, strategies, and reports; and community consultations to gain a common understanding of trends and issues impacting wellbeing in Lethbridge. It assesses progress to date and summarises the environmental conditions in which the CSD Strategy is being implemented.

Turner Strategies worked with CSD administrative staff and consultant Kimberly Lyall to undertake the project over the course of October 2018 – March 2019.

METHODS

To develop the Needs Assessment, a number of key methods were used:

1. Data Analysis:

- » Socio-demographic data analysis to discern common trends from available data sources

2. Community Engagement:

- » Via interviews with community stakeholders, a public questionnaire and community leaders dialogue sessions to gauge community climate with respect to data analysis

3. Current Efforts to Address Wellbeing:

- » Environmental scan of local organisations, strategies and reports related to various community wellbeing efforts; and

4. System Asset Mapping:

- » Social asset mapping of current social service agencies and programs, and an evaluation of the Lethbridge Charitable Sector Financial analysis

Each of these activities are summarised below to help prioritise needs and inform key directions for the new CSD Strategic Plan.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

Social, economic, health, and housing data offer a rich description of Lethbridge's population. The following are selected highlights from quantitative research and analyses:



A GROWING COMMUNITY

APPROACHING 100,000

Lethbridge has seen steady growth and is expected to reach 100,000 in population in 2019.¹ Population pressures associated with urbanization are associated with social challenges, particularly housing affordability/homelessness, population health, poverty, and strains on existing infrastructure.

100,000

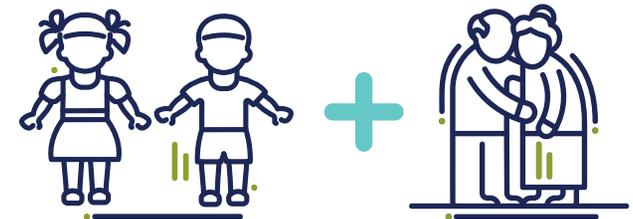
A DIVERSIFIED AND STABLE ECONOMY

Driven more by agriculture and food processing than by oil, Lethbridge's diversified economy has had steady growth with a 2.3%² rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018, despite Alberta's overall slowdown.³ Lethbridge continues to have the second-lowest rate of unemployment in Alberta at 4.8%.⁴ In Lethbridge the public sector accounts for 9 of the top 10 major employers including health care, education, and government services.



MORE SENIORS AND CHILDREN

Age groups with the highest growth are those under 15 and those between 65 and 80.⁵ Seniors make up a higher percent of the population in Lethbridge compared to Alberta overall. This population dependency creates different pressures on services from a significant segment needing care and supports.



SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION

The past decade has seen tremendous increase in the number of Indigenous residents in Lethbridge: a 40% increase between 2011 and 2016, accounting for 6% of the Lethbridge population in 2016.⁶ Lethbridge was established on Blackfoot lands and Lethbridge borders the Blood Reserve – the largest in Canada and third most populous.⁷



MORE IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The largest settlement of Bhutanese in Canada occurred in Lethbridge in 2016, followed by an influx of new residents from Syria. Together with overall immigration, this resulted in a 43% increase in newcomers to the community over the past 10 years.⁸ Growing diversity places additional pressures on tailoring supports and strengthening social inclusion measures among citizens to promote welcoming communities.





BASIC NEEDS

POVERTY RATES

In 2015, 14% of Lethbridge households were low-income, compared to 11% in Alberta and other cities of the same size (Grande Prairie and Red Deer). These rates were higher for single persons (27%), lone parents (26%), new immigrants (18%), Indigenous people (27%), and children (16%).⁹



DEPRIVATION ACROSS THE CITY

Residents in North Lethbridge have higher material needs (lack of everyday goods and commodities), and residents in both North and South Lethbridge have higher social needs (fragility of an individual's social network, from the family to the community).¹⁰ **Housing affordability is a growing concern** in central neighbourhoods as well.

FOOD SECURITY

While overall **food bank usage has decreased** among demographics, a concerning increase among seniors has occurred that merits a closer investigation.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Households that owned their dwelling paid an average monthly shelter cost of \$1,224, compared to \$1,038 for tenant households. While vacancy rates remained above 3% in 2017, rental costs did not see significant improvement; in fact, **21% of renters were paying more than half their income in shelter costs.**¹¹ Renters living alone, lone parents, Indigenous people, and recent immigrants are having higher affordability challenges.

HOMELESSNESS RATES RAPIDLY GROWING

Looking at the 2006–2018 period, homeless **point-in-time counts show an overall increase from 113 to 223 (97%)**; however, looking closer, we see an overall decline until 2016, followed by a sharp jump in 2018 of 151%.¹² The higher number of homeless individuals in 2018 is partially explained by the City's increased outreach efforts and improved methodologies to identify homeless individuals in health and/or correctional facilities.

INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

Indigenous representation and mobility are also reflected in the 2018 Point-in-Time Count of people experiencing homelessness in Lethbridge. Of note, **73% of those enumerated were Indigenous.** Approximately two thirds (62%) of survey participants had arrived in the past five years. Of these, 52% came in the last year or less.

The top reasons for migration into Lethbridge for Indigenous respondents were:

1. **To Access Services and Supports,**
2. **To Find Housing, and**
3. **To Access Emergency Shelters.**



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

SPIKE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

Police-reported domestic violence crimes reached close to 1,700 in 2017 – up 50% since 2013. Lethbridge is three times that of Alberta’s average (636 for every 100,000 in 2015).¹³



LONE PARENTS ABOVE PROVINCIAL AVERAGE

At 15.6%, Lethbridge is home to a higher-than-the-provincial average (14.5%) of families led by a lone parent.¹⁴ Four out of five families led by a lone parent are women, which is a pattern consistent across the entire province.



SOME CHILDREN ARE HAVING DIFFICULTIES MEETING DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS

In 2014, the Alberta Early Development Instrument was designed to measure children’s ability to meet appropriate development expectations for health, social competency, emotional maturity, language, thinking, and communications. Findings suggest Lethbridge Kindergarten-aged children are experiencing difficulty or great difficulty at similar levels to Albertan children ranging from 21–28% having difficulties in these domains.¹⁵





POPULATION HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

MIXED POPULATION HEALTH TRENDS

Between 2009 and 2014, a number of positive changes occurred for Lethbridge residents: reduced life stress and daily smoking, increased sense of belonging, access to a family doctor, and physical activity. Simultaneously, however, heavy drinking and those reporting being overweight also increased.¹⁶

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

The South Zone had self-rated mental health as very good or excellent (64%), which is lower than Alberta average (72%),¹⁷ and the rates of anxiety and depression prescriptions are higher. ER visits in Lethbridge due to mental health emergencies are higher than Alberta as well, with rates of suicide increasing over recent years.



HIGHER MORTALITY RATES

From 2013–15, Lethbridge’s mortality rate was up to 21% higher in the three local geographic areas than the Alberta average of 634.7 per 100,000 – these are primarily driven by circulatory system diseases (abnormalities of the heart and vessel system).¹⁸ This is an important factor when we consider premature death causes, including heart disease and suicide rates being higher in Lethbridge than Alberta averages.



FENTANYL-RELATED OVERDOSES TRIPLED SINCE 2016

Lethbridge’s fentanyl-related poisoning deaths reached a rate of 25.1 per 100,000 for 2018. This is a 202% increase since 2016. Of note, the rate of these overdose deaths increased by 84.3% from 2016 to 2017, and from 2017 to 2018, the percentage increase was less: 64.0%.¹⁹ This suggests the fentanyl-related death rate is slowing. Complete 2018 data for an opioid other than fentanyl is not yet available.²⁰

4X HIGHER

DEMANDS FOR POLICE ARE UP

The Lethbridge Police Service is experiencing an increase in calls for service. In 2017, there were 33,643 calls compared to 30,799 in 2016.²¹ Annual Report Data highlights an increase in theft: up 115% compared to 2013 – reaching almost 4,000 reported cases. There were no murders and fewer sex-related crimes.



MORE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

With an aging population, rates of disability have increased in the community. Developmental disabilities have also increased, as has the caseload of Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) recipients in Lethbridge.



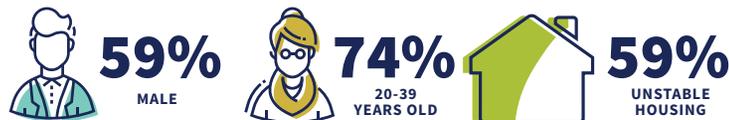
SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION TRENDS

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION USE TOTALS 190,000 VISITS TO DATE

Since opening in February 2018, the ARCHES Supervised Consumption Site (SCS) was increasingly visited over the course of the year to a total of 190,000 times. Notably, the number of unique clients increased from 90 in February to about 1,034 in December.²²

LIKELIER TO BE INDIGENOUS, HAVE UNSTABLE HOUSING, AND YOUNGER.

As is the case with the homeless population, Indigenous people were significantly over-represented among SCS users at 55% compared to 6% of the total population. Overall, SCS users were likelier to be male (59%), 20–39 years old (74%), and of those who reported their housing situation, 57% were unstable (shelter, no fixed address, jail, treatment, etc.).²³



A LETHBRIDGE WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS AND THRIVES.

1.4 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS

Community engagement is central to planning and decision-making as it helps the City of Lethbridge build a local strategy that is person-centred and has buy-in from service providers.

PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Lethbridge citizens identified the main challenges facing the community as: **crime, violence, the sense of safety, the adequacy of substance use/addictions, and mental health supports**. Other unmet basic needs including homelessness, housing affordability, and poverty were rated highly as well.

The impacts of these issues resulted in **70%** of questionnaire respondents giving an overall assessment of Lethbridge's wellbeing, at the community level, to be **either poor or fair** (based on a question within the public questionnaire).

When asked to prioritize their top three issues requiring action, questionnaire respondents identified the top 3 as:

1. **Substance abuse/addiction services**
2. **Addressing crime**
3. **Mental health supports**

Of note, the issues of employment and education opportunities, social disconnection and racism, as well as coordination/ accessibility of services were also highly rated, albeit lower than the priorities identified above.

Questionnaire respondents identified key populations whose needs require particular attention and tailored supports. These key populations are low income, homeless, experiencing violence, and struggling with mental health and/or addictions. In terms of demographics, **Indigenous people, children and youth, seniors, and newcomers** were further identified as needing additional attention. Of note, considerable comments surrounding stray animals (cats) emerged in the survey comments as well.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Over a period of 4 months, more than 300 people in Lethbridge were consulted in an effort to understand wellbeing in the community. A broad range of stakeholders were represented:

Social Services Providers

Emergency Services

Faith Community

Voluntary Sector

Business Community

CSD Department

Funders

General Public

Vulnerable Citizens

Newcomers

Women

Indigenous

Children/Youth

Seniors

STAKEHOLDER INPUT SUMMARY

Stakeholder interviews highlighted a number of themes regarding social pressures:

ECONOMIC

- » Alberta's economic downturn has attributed to increased domestic violence, poverty, stress and related social issues in Lethbridge.
- » Increased need for social services at the same time that providers saw decreased revenues from operations and decreased donations from community. This has resulted in strain on staff and increased waitlists.
- » Significant increased operational costs (utilities, wages, etc.) for service providers without related increases in base operating revenues or funding.

SOCIAL

- » Breakdown of families and lack of safe family environments and supports. There has been an increase in grandparents, aunts & uncles becoming primary caregivers for children because parents are incarcerated, struggling with addictions, have overdosed, and/or are deceased.
- » Increase in all types of violence.
- » Increase in substance abuse.
- » Greater severity & complexity of mental health issues.
- » Increasing poverty gap.

COMMUNITY

- » A sense of loss, sadness, frustration and anger in the community feeling that Lethbridge is no longer safe, clean and family-friendly.
- » Businesses and organizations are needing to increase security measures such as: locking doors (customers must be buzzed in), installing or increasing security cameras, having fences erected around property, adding lighting around property.
- » There are fewer visits to downtown and to community parks suggested as measures to minimized exposure to intoxicated individuals or drug debris. People are reluctant to work downtown for fear of exposure to crime, erratic behaviours, theft and more.
- » Greater reliance on online shopping. No need to go to local stores or restaurants in person. Less revenue for businesses and greater disconnect to community.

1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: CURRENT WELLBEING EFFORTS

The past decade has seen a collection of important documents produced by different organisations within the community, including the City of Lethbridge, which address social needs. It is clear that CSD and various social service agencies have been working hard to address priority needs. Moving towards the creation of a Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy, it will be important to evaluate what has already been done, what is currently being done well, and what did not work well, so that we can avoid duplications, increase efficiencies, and build on successes.

The following table highlights the number of strategies, policies, and reports that have been undertaken in our community that will help inform current efforts to address wellbeing in our community.

Figure 1: Wellbeing Efforts by Focus Area

	Poverty/Income Security	Housing/Homelessness	Racism/Discrimination	Addictions/Mental Health/Wellness	Crime/Community Safety/Family Violence	Learning/Literacy	Family Wellbeing/Child Development	Disconnection/Isolation/Social inclusion	Transportation	Reconciliation	Seniors, Newcomers, Indigenous, Youth, Disabled Persons	Access/Gaps/Infrastructure/Coordination	Food Security	Environment
Policies, Strategies, and Plans	0	4	5	2	2	1	4	3	2	2	3	6	0	1
Reports and Evaluations	2	1	2	3	2	2	1	3	0	0	6	1	2	2
TOTAL	2	5	7	5	4	3	5	6	2	2	9	7	2	3

1.6 ASSET MAPPING

Asset Mapping is an important activity in asset-based community development that emphasizes identifying community strengths and resources. A new platform called HelpSeeker²⁵ has been rolled out in Lethbridge across **400 social services**, and this has generated a real-time inventory and map of community resources.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

A fulsome analysis of the local resources relevant to wellbeing was undertaken to inform identification of local needs and their corresponding responses. The most common foci of services in Lethbridge are health, public health, education/training, information/referral, and mental health. The most common populations served by these services were adults, families, seniors, and children.

Organisations providing supports and services were asked, via questionnaire administered by the Lethbridge Asset Mapping Project (LAMP), to identify their top challenges in program provision.

They ranked funding (enough and stability), marketing of programs and services, and volunteer management as their top challenges.

The City of Lethbridge makes up 1.6% of funding to social services. The total tracked financial investment in local charities was \$700 million, of which \$8.6 million came from the City of Lethbridge – about 1.6%.²⁶ Moving forward, it is essential that the City consider how best to maximize its limited investment to influence the broader \$700M community social asset value for best outcomes.

FINANCIAL INVESTMENT IN LOCAL CHARITIES

\$700 MILLION

ALONE WE
CAN DO
SO LITTLE,
TOGETHER
WE CAN DO
SO MUCH

1.7 SUMMARY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The Needs Assessment report outlines trends and issues impacting wellbeing in Lethbridge that directly shape the strategic directions for the CSD department moving forward. The diverse perspectives and sources of information analysed converged on several key priority social issues and demographic groups requiring tailored responses that will guide the direction of the CSD Strategy.

Table 1: Dominant Social Issues & Priority Populations

DOMINANT SOCIAL ISSUES

- » Mental health & addictions supports
- » Balancing prevention & crisis responses
- » Community safety measures
- » Interpersonal violence prevention/ intervention
- » Homelessness response
- » Poverty & inequality measures
- » Enhancing resilience and coping skills
- » Coordinating support services
- » Education, employment, training

PRIORITY POPULATIONS

- » Indigenous peoples
- » Youth & young adults
- » Seniors
- » Immigrants and refugees
- » Women fleeing violence
- » Families with children
- » People with disabilities
- » Those facing mental health, addictions
- » Low income households

Note: these are not in any particular order.

The City's role as a convener on social issues is to spur action across diverse assets and initiatives to set Lethbridge up for success long-term where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. The way forward will require strategic and intentional leveraging of community assets and will, both locally and regionally.

With CSD's direct investment being very limited to provincial and federal flow-through funding of services, the value add of their involvement is that of convener among willing stakeholders working on social wellbeing. Moving forward, it is essential that the City consider how best to maximize its limited investment to influence the broader \$700M community social asset value for best outcomes for the community.

During the development of the Needs Assessment Report, an overarching theme presented itself that expanded the direction of the effort from one focused on the CSD department to a more comprehensive community-wide strategy on wellbeing and safety.



1.8 AFFIRMING DIRECTION TOWARDS COMMON AIMS

To gauge community feedback on these strategic directions, the City convened key community leaders together to provide feedback and discuss the possibilities of future collaborative work on community wellbeing and safety on January 31, 2019.²⁷ From this dialogue, the City prepared its CSD Strategic Plan and received community support to begin convening key stakeholders to develop a Lethbridge Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy over the course of the year.

On January 31, 2019 stakeholders expressed that enhanced integration of efforts will ultimately be needed, paving the way forward to address common priorities collectively. There was agreement that the City of Lethbridge should continue to convene stakeholders to develop the Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy, with the understanding that the eventual role of the City in this work would be determined over the course of this next phase of work.

Based on this community feedback, CSD will propose a community-wide Strategic Plan to Council that focuses on supporting this direction as per stakeholder feedback, and the findings of the needs assessment.

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