

# Encampment Response

Quarterly Report - 2026 Q1

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**City of Lethbridge**

# Overview

The City of Lethbridge's Encampment Strategy represents a compassionate and adaptive response to the complex and evolving issue of homelessness and encampments within the community. This report provides a quarterly update on the encampment strategy, in alignment with Council direction. The report outlines trends, outcomes, and key activities from January 1, 2026 to March 31, 2026 (Q1).

Previous reports can be found on the [Community Social Development](#) website.

## Q1 Key Highlights

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- **Current Encampment Landscape** – Encampments decreased in Q1 2026 compared to Q1 2025, with a 68% overall reduction. Despite this decline, encampments have increasingly shifted toward fewer, larger, and more complex sites. These encampments are often located in close proximity to support services, contributing to concentrated activity and elevated fire and safety concerns.
- **Outreach Services** – Outreach engagement increased in Q1 2026, with higher intakes, referrals, and improved success rates in connecting participants to services. This reflects stronger system coordination and a shift towards addressing more complex needs, including addiction, mental health, and medical support.
- **Key Trends** – Encampment activity in Q1 2026 has been characterized by increased concentration in specific hotspots, evolving response strategies following fire-related incidents, and expanded engagement with community stakeholders.
- **Looking Ahead** – As we move into Q2 2026, the landscape surrounding encampment activity and service demand remains fluid and increasingly complex. Although overall encampment numbers and 311 reports have declined, seasonal patterns, shifting geographic activity, and the rise of larger, more entrenched sites continue to drive operational pressure. At the same time, system-level changes including the closure of a short-term housing facility and evolving mental health and addiction supports are expected to increase service needs and create new challenges.

# Encampment Response

## 311 Reports

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In Q1 2026, the total number of 311 reports decreased from 191 in Q1 2025 to 137, representing a 28% decrease. This shift is driven by reductions across most report categories, suggesting fewer visible encampments and potentially reduced identification or reporting of abandoned debris. In contrast, needle-related concerns increased by 59%, rising from 19 to 32. Overall, the data indicates a decline in encampment-adjacent reporting, with needle debris emerging as an outlier requiring targeted attention.

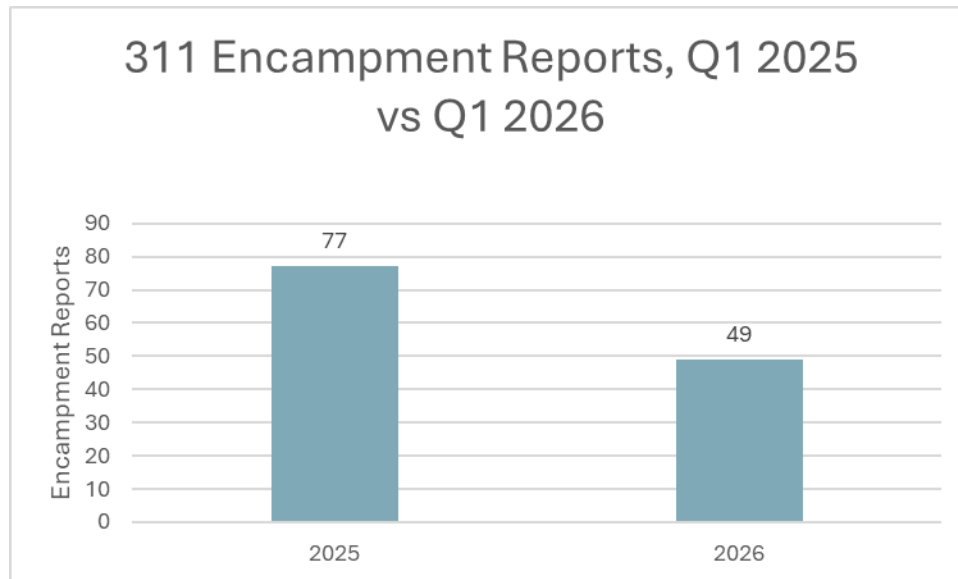
This trend aligns with a geographic shift in activity from the downtown core to areas such as 2A Avenue North. Engagement with businesses in these areas suggests lower awareness of available reporting tools and services, which may be contributing to reduced reporting rather than a full decrease in activity. Continued

education and engagement are critical, as both City and LPS responses rely on consistent, data-driven reporting to inform deployment and interventions.

Table 1: 311 Report Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

311 Report Type	Q1 2025	Q1 2026
Encampment Reports	77	49
Debris	55	26
Biohazard	40	30
Needle	19	32
<b>Total 311 Reports</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>137</b>

Figure 1: 311 Encampment Reports, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026



## Confirmed Encampments

Confirmed encampments decreased from 313 in Q1 2025 to 113 in Q1 2026. While no single factor can be confirmed, this reduction is likely influenced by increased shelter capacity following the 2025 expansion of the Lethbridge Wellness Shelter, sustained outreach and service connection efforts, and seasonal conditions that have encouraged greater use of indoor shelter options.

Additionally, changes in encampment composition and classification provide important context for interpreting this decline. In Q1 2025, encampments within hotspot areas were often recorded as individual sites, with each structure counted separately during triage. As the year progressed, it became clear that multiple structures were frequently associated with



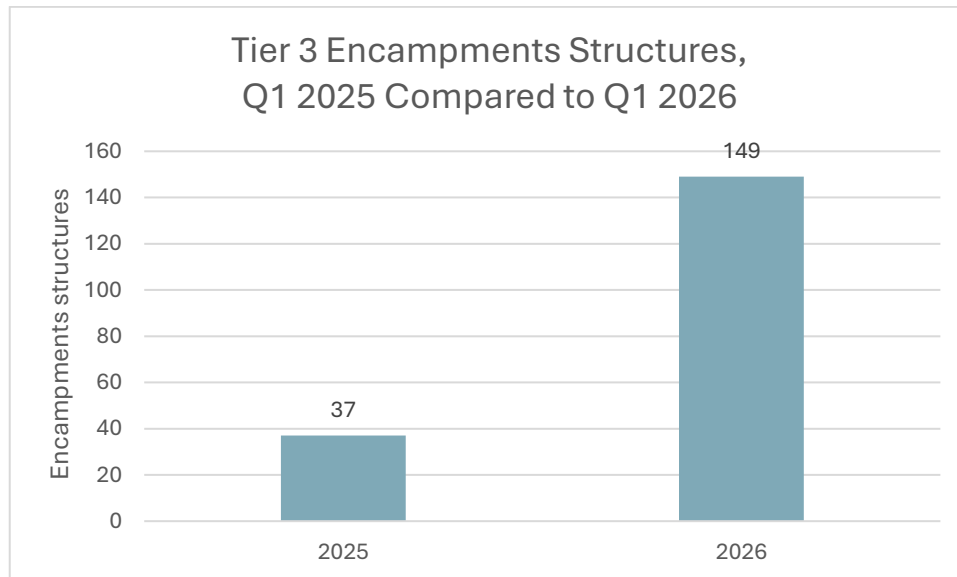
the same individual or group of people, requiring reclassification to Tier 3 encampments. The updated classification is reflected in Q1 2026 data, which shows fewer Tier 2 encampments and an increase in Tier 3 sites. In Q1 2026, 149 structures were identified within Tier 3 encampments, compared to 37 in Q1 2025, indicating greater size and complexity among remaining sites.

As a result, while the overall number of confirmed encampments has decreased, identified encampment are becoming more complex and resource intensive. The proportion of Tier 3 encampments continues to exceed the departmental target of <10%, reinforcing the need for continued focus on outreach, a coordinated multi-agency response, and addressing high-complexity sites.

Table 2: Confirmed Encampment Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

Confirmed Encampments	Q1 2025	% of Total	Q1 2026	% of Total
Tier 1	38	12%	40	35%
Tier 2	262	84%	45	40%
Tier 3	13	4%	28	25%
Encampments with Youths	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total Confirmed Encampments</b>	<b>313</b>		<b>113</b>	

Figure 2: Tier 3 Encampment Structures, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026



## Coordinated Encampment Cleanups

Coordinated encampment cleanups declined by 30% from Q1 2025 to Q1 2026, corresponding with the overall reduction in confirmed encampments. As a result, there was a decrease in the number of structures removed and total debris collected.

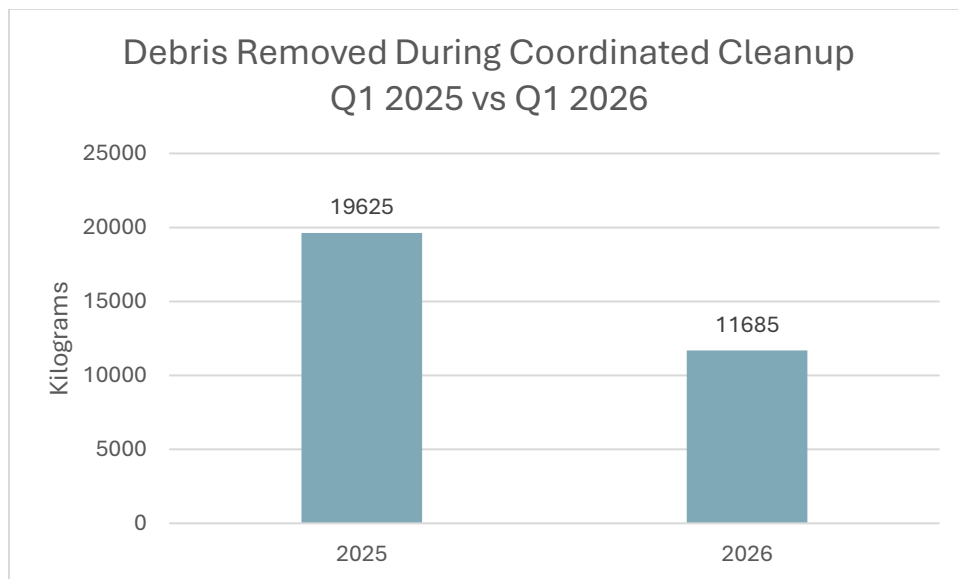
While the number of cleanups has decreased, the nature of these responses has shifted, with a greater proportion involving higher-complexity Tier 3 encampments. For example, during this reporting period, one

location contained 17 structures and 22 unique individuals, requiring additional resources and coordination. As a result, a consistent and coordinated approach to addressing Tier 3 encampments remains essential to ensure safety, effective engagement, and appropriate service connections.

Table 3: Coordinated Cleanup Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

Coordinated Clean Ups	Q1 2025	Q1 2026
Cleanups Held	20	14
Structures Removed	276	175
Tier 3 Encampments Cleaned up	10	27
Debris Removed	19,625 kg	11,685 kg

Figure 3: Debris From Coordinated Cleanups, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026



## Outreach

### Intakes

Outreach intakes increased by 77% in Q1 2026 compared to Q1 2025. This increase aligns with encampment trends, where fewer overall sites are accompanied by greater complexity among those remaining unsheltered. Together, these patterns suggest that while some individuals are transitioning into shelter and services, those who remain unsheltered present with higher needs, contributing to both increased system engagement and more intensive support requirements.

Additionally, the number of participants completing outreach intake who were already listed on the Unique Identifier List (UIL) increased. This suggests that more service providers are using the Homeless Individuals

and Families Information System (HIFIS), enabling individuals to be identified across services and to access multiple points of support. The increased use of HIFIs will continue to strengthen system coordination, enhance wraparound service delivery, improve continuity of care, and reduce duplication.

Table 5: Outreach Intake Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

Intakes	Q1 2025	Q1 2026
New to UIL	10	10
Inactive on UIL	5	5
Active on UIL	3	16
Renewal	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>32</b>

## Referrals

Referrals completed through outreach increased by 60% in Q1 2026 compared to Q1 2025, reflecting the rise in outreach intakes. Referrals for addiction and mental health services more than doubled, with a significant increase in medical support, indicating greater complexity in participants' needs. In contrast, referrals for housing and housing readiness declined. The shift is likely influenced by participants working towards recovery-oriented goals and housing case management models that require sobriety. As a result, participants are increasingly seeking referrals for addiction-related support as a pathway toward long-term housing stability. However, wait times for detox and treatment services can extend up to three months, creating a gap between referral and service access. During this period, the Outreach Team continues to provide ongoing support through regular check-ins, encouragement toward treatment engagement, and preparation for housing readiness to support smoother transitions once services become available.

Despite these system barriers, referral success rates have increased, rising from 60% in Q1 2025 to 62% in Q1 2026. Although a moderate increase, this suggests stronger connections to services, improved participant follow-through, and greater effectiveness in navigating complex service pathways.

Overall, these trends reinforce the growing intersection between homelessness, mental health, and substance use, and highlight the importance of continued investment in treatment access, reduced wait times, and recovery-oriented supports to meet evolving community needs.

Table 4: Outreach Referral Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

Referral Area	Q12025	Q1 2026
Housing	16	6
Housing Readiness	27	33
Addiction and Mental Health	10	27
Medical Supports	1	10
Other	11	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>104</b>

\*Other referrals refers to basic needs, crisis intervention, family relationship preservation, legal support, food security, outreach exit, skill enhancement, social and community connections, and transportation.

## Individuals Housed

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Housing outcomes remained stable in Q1 2026 compared to Q1 2025, with four individuals exiting homelessness by getting connected to housing, treatment, or natural supports in both periods. While overall data remained consistent, there were small shifts in the types of exits. The increase in treatment outcomes aligns with the high number of participants applying to treatment programs, as noted in Table 4. This trend is expected to continue into Q2 as applications progress through waitlists.

Table 6: Individuals Housed Breakdown, Q1 2025 Compared to Q1 2026

Individuals Housed	Q1 2025	Q1 2026
Exited to Housing	2	3
Exited to Treatment	0	1
Exited to Natural Supports	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

## Success Story

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While data provides insight into trends and outcomes, it does not fully capture the complexity of individual experiences. The following example highlights how outreach services and cross-sector collaboration can address complex needs and improve outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness.

A notable success during Q1 of 2026, the outreach team was supporting a participant with complex medical and daily living needs. Through intensive case planning, coordination, and advocacy combined with a multiagency support approach, the Outreach Team was able to minimize multiple system barriers which enabled successful medical placement. Due to their daily medical care needs that cannot be supported through community agencies, the individual will now have a proper assessment to support with a long-term placement with appropriate medical support. By successfully case planning and utilizing this multiagency support network our participant now is at less risk of injury and infection, less risk of being financially abused and one step closer to the goal of a long-term placement in a continuing care center.

## Operational Strengths

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### Community Collaboration

Collaboration with the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre and Streets Alive Mission has strengthened service coordination and participant engagement. The Outreach Team has used these spaces to meet with participants, complete intakes, and work on service plan goals in a more confidential setting. These collaborations have created efficiency in the Outreach Team’s daily operations by enabling communication to locate participants for appointments and services.

These partnerships have enhanced daily operations by improving communication and supporting coordination of appointments and services. As a result, this has reduced duplication and increased consistency in participant engagement within the shelter area. During this quarter, there has been an

increase in contacts, improved appointment follow-through, and renewed engagement from individuals who had previously declined services. The increase in intakes and referrals associated with these collaborations supported four individuals exiting homelessness in Q1 2026.

## Business Owner Engagement

The ERT engaged with local businesses in the 2A Avenue area, where business owners have reported increased social disorder. During these engagements, the ERT provided education on how to report to 311 via phone or the online Report Public Safety Hazard platform, as well as strategies to help mitigate risks around their business. Feedback and insights from these discussions informed a more proactive response, including increased monitoring and presence in areas with higher levels of activity involving vulnerable populations.

## Operational Challenges

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### Hotspot Locations

The area surrounding the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre remained a consistent hotspot in Q1 2026. While overall confirmed encampments have decreased across the community, activity remains concentrated in this area and is primarily comprised of higher-complexity Tier 3 encampments.

This concentration reflects the high volume of individuals accessing nearby services and contributes to increased operational complexity in the area. In response, the ERT and Outreach teams have worked closely with local service providers to strengthen communication and coordination, supporting a more consistent and effective response to evolving needs.

### Strategies and Actions Taken

To address increasing complexity within Tier 3 encampments and enhance staff and community safety, the ERT and LPS implemented strategies informed by approaches used in Edmonton. These strategies include sectioning off high-density encampment areas during coordinated cleanups, allowing teams to operate within smaller, more manageable zones while reducing unnecessary foot traffic. These measures have enhanced operational safety when responding to larger, more entrenched sites.

These strategies reflect a targeted, adaptive approach to evolving encampment conditions, in which sites are larger and more complex, requiring greater coordination. As Tier 3 encampments continue to drive more resource-intensive responses, these measures support safer, more effective operations in challenging environments.



### Health, Safety and Environmental Concerns

Health and safety risks associated with encampments remain a key concern, particularly regarding fire hazards. In Q1 2026, the ERT, in partnership with LPS, removed 135 propane tanks from encampments, compared to 82 in Q1 2025, reflecting enhanced proactive efforts to mitigate risks. As part of business engagement efforts, the ERT provided education on mitigating fire risks related to encampments, reinforcing prevention and timely reporting.

Despite these measures, fire-related incidents continue to occur. LPS reported four encampment-related fires during this reporting period. One incident involved an overnight fire set by an encampment occupant that affected two local businesses, causing property damage and the temporary closure of one location. Additionally, in response to two fires set within the coulee system, the ERT and Fire Prevention conducted proactive checks in low-traffic areas of the river valley to identify potential fire hazards, resulting in the removal of 450 kg of abandoned debris.

These incidents highlight the broader community impact of encampment-related risks and reinforce the importance of timely reporting, coordinated response, and continued proactive mitigation efforts to support safer outcomes for both occupants and the surrounding community.



## Looking Ahead

### Anticipated Trends

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As we enter Q2, several interconnected trends are expected to shape encampment and outreach activity, service demands, and operational pressures across the system. While overall encampment and 311 reporting have declined, the underlying dynamics remain complex, and in some areas, risks are intensifying rather than easing.

- Seasonal increases in encampment activity are expected, including the emergence of new and re-established sites, particularly in remote and difficult-to-access areas such as the River Valley. This trend will likely lead to increased coordinated cleanups and expanded monitoring in hotspot areas.
- Encampment complexity is expected to remain high, with Tier 3 sites continuing to represent the majority of confirmed encampments. While overall encampment counts may remain lower than in previous years, the number of structures within Tier 3 sites is expected to increase. This increase will result in a greater need for coordinated cleanups to prevent entrenchment, address elevated fire and safety risks, and ensure individuals are connected to services.
- As business owners become more aware of available services and how to report different types of social disorder, 311 reporting is expected to increase.
- At the beginning of Q2 2026, changes to short-term housing support will occur with the closure of a transitional housing program. This closure will reduce available transitional support for individuals awaiting treatment and housing and may increase the number of individuals entering or re-entering homelessness.
- Outreach engagement is expected to continue increasing as more individuals are identified and connected through coordinated systems. Demand for mental health, addiction, and medical support is likely to remain high, requiring sustained engagement, follow-through, and coordination with service partners.
- Outreach engagement will likely increase as more individuals are identified and connected through coordinated systems, and as seasonal increases in encampment activity. These conditions are

expected to drive continued demand for mental health, addiction, and medical support, requiring sustained engagement, consistent follow-through, and strong coordination with service partners.

While some indicators suggest improvement, the operational environment remains fluid and complex. The ERT and Outreach Team will continue to adapt by strengthening education and reporting awareness, maintaining a visible presence in emerging hotspot areas, and deepening cross-agency collaboration to support effective pathways out of homelessness.