

Encampment Response

Quarterly Report - 2025 Q2, Q3 and Q4

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 in alignment with the Encampment Strategy and Council direction to receive reports on a quarterly basis. However, due to the municipal election in October 2025 and altered Council and Standing Policy Committee Meetings, the reports for Q2, Q3, and Q4 of 2025 have been consolidated into a single report. This report covers the following periods:

- **Q2:** April 1, 2025, to June 31, 2025
- **Q3:** July 1, 2025, to September 31, 2025
- **Q4:** October 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025

Prior Council Update:

On June 19th, 2025, the Safety and Social Standing Policy Committee approved the change in reporting frequency from bi-monthly to quarterly and received a 2023-2025 Encampment Update as information. The comprehensive report detailed encampment response efforts since initiation including, highlighting achievements such as a positive shift in public sentiment and successful implementation of the internal City of Lethbridge Outreach Team.

Q2, Q3 and Q4 Key Highlights

- **Current Encampment Landscape** – While reports of encampments continue to be made across the city, they continue to be primarily concentrated in a few specific locations near service providers.
- **Outreach Services** – During this reporting period, outreach services emphasized intensive case planning, complex referrals, and collaboration with other service providers. The success rate of community referrals was 61%, and 15 individuals exited homelessness in 2025.
- **Key Trends** – Overarching trends that have affected the Encampment landscape, including concentrated encampment hotspots, increased risk levels, policing resources and engagement with stakeholders and other communities.
- **Looking Ahead** – This report outlines how the ERT plans to move forward by navigating ongoing challenges while continuing and refining current strategies.

The success of the Encampment Strategy relies on strong partnerships and a consistent, coordinated approach to encampment response. The ERT and outreach services have worked diligently to adapt to emerging challenges and trends observed between Q2 and Q4.

Encampment Response

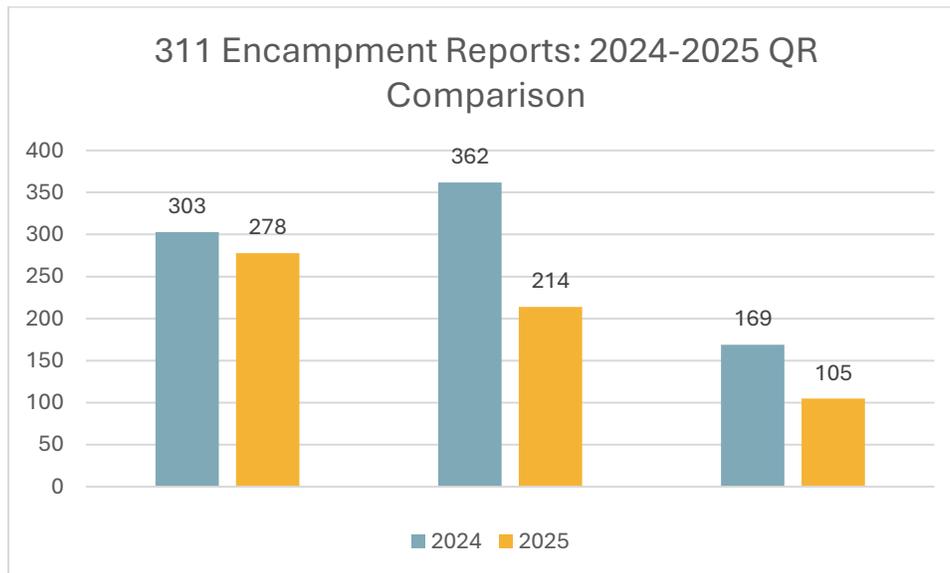
311 Reports

Community members may report public safety hazards through the 311 online portal or by calling 311. The ERT reviews and responds to encampment and debris-related reports, and dispatches complaints of biohazards and needle-related concerns to the Downtown BRZ Clean Sweep Program (CSP).

Table 1: 311 Report Breakdown

	2025	Q2	Q3	Q4
Encampment Reports	278	214	105	
Debris	84	106	49	
Biohazard	55	50	26	
Needle	50	78	46	
Total 311 Reports	467	448	226	

Figure 1: 311 2024-2025 QR Comparison



Reports of encampments submitted through 311 have decreased as these encampments have become more concentrated in specific hotspot areas, which are often less visible to the broader community. Although these hotspot areas affect community members, they may assume the ERT is already aware of them and do not report them. However, residents are encouraged to continue reporting.

Confirmed Encampments

When attending an encampment, the ERT will generate an encampment incident and complete a 16-factor risk assessment to assess the safety and risk to encampment occupants and the surrounding community. Encampments are categorized as:

Tier 1: Inactive sites that are vacated.

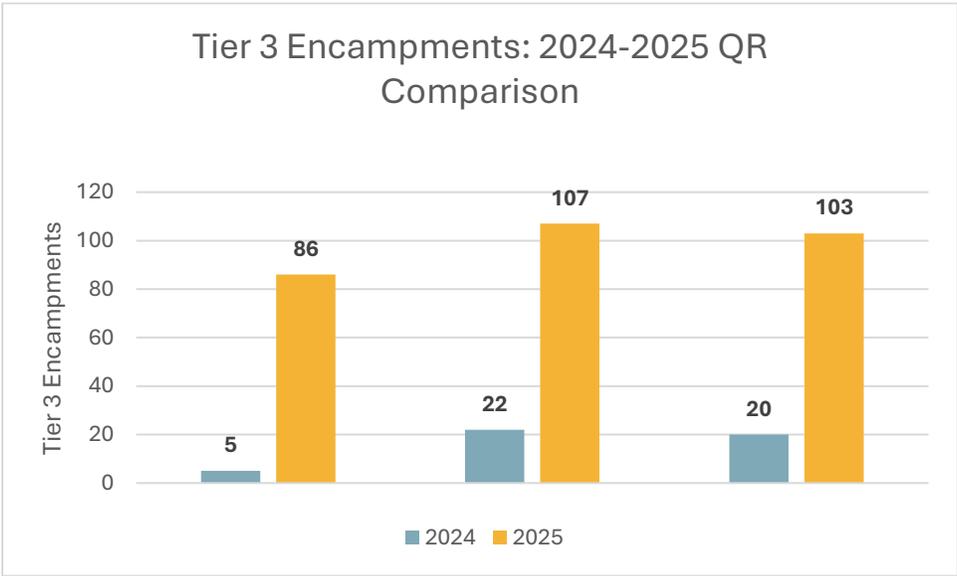
Tier 2: Active sites that consist of one or two structures where no immediate health or safety risk is posed to occupants or community.

Tier 3: Active sites that consist of three or more structures and/or pose high fire, injury, health or safety risk to occupants and community.

Table 2: Confirmed Encampment Breakdown

2025	Q2	Q3	Q4
Tier 1	49	24	20
Tier 2	325	170	125
Tier 3	86	107	103
Encampments with Youths	0	0	1
Total Confirmed Encampments	460	301	249

Figure 2: Tier 3 2024-2025 QR Comparison



During this reporting period, there has been a notable increase in tier 3 encampments. These encampments are larger and pose greater safety concerns than those classified as tier 1 or tier 2. Addressing tier 3 encampments requires greater coordination and resources.

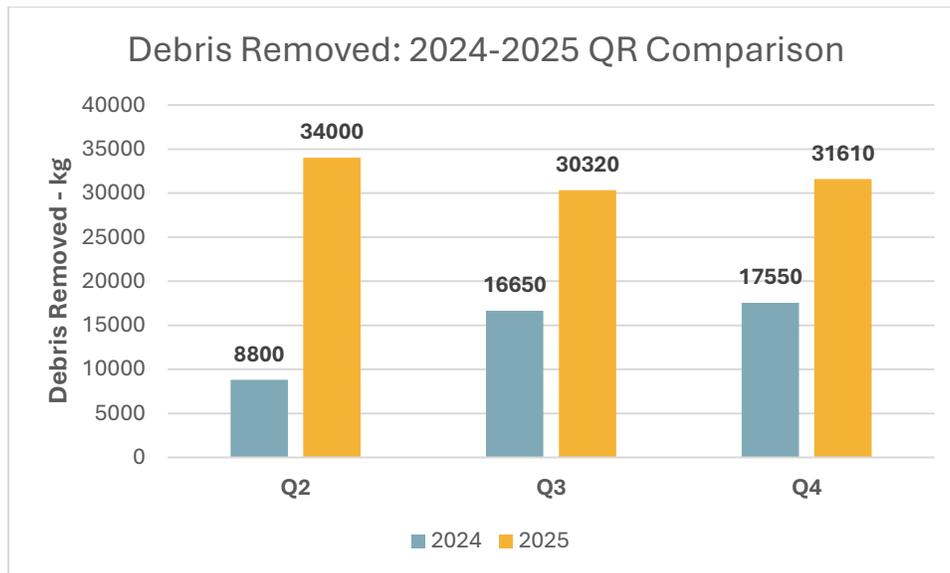
Coordinated Encampment Cleanups

Coordinated encampment cleanups take place after the ERT has triaged the encampments, outreach service has been provided, and a 24-hr notice to vacate has been issued. A coordinated encampment cleanup consists of the ERT, Outreach Services, Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) and CSP

Table 3: Coordinated Cleanup Breakdown

2025	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cleanups Held	26	24	19
Structures Removed	703	794	715
Debris Removed	34,000 kg	30,320 kg	31,610 kg

Figure 3: Debris 2024-2025 QR Comparison



Debris associated with encampments has increased significantly compared to previous years. Materials removed typically include remnants of abandoned encampments and items voluntarily discarded by encampment occupants.

Outreach

The City of Lethbridge’s outreach team has been fully operational since August 2024. In alignment with the City’s Encampment Strategy, outreach services work closely with the ERT, The Watch, and the LPS to support individuals residing in encampments and those who are experiencing homelessness. The outreach team helps individuals navigate the system of care by assisting with accessing services and completing complex referrals for substance use, mental health issues, and other barriers to obtaining stable housing.

In addition, the Watch supports outreach services by focusing on light referrals and system navigation for individuals experiencing homelessness, while the outreach team handles service identification and complex referrals.

The Watch

The Watch continues to support service capacity by attending tier 2 encampments with lower levels of entrenchment within their service area. Outreach services will contact the Watch to arrange a visit to a location. The Watch will then assist individuals through light touchpoints, such as transportation support from the Diversion Outreach Team (DOT), referrals for medical detox, or basic system navigation. If a referral to The Watch is outside of their scope, they will re-refer back to the outreach team. In 2025, the Watch attended 20 unique encampments to offer outreach services.

Referrals

The outreach team completes referrals in accordance with goals established in case plans. Referrals include housing, housing readiness, medical, addiction, and mental health support. The goal of referrals is to help individuals achieve long-term housing, while addressing immediate needs.

Referrals outcomes measured by tracking success rates; this means tracking is the referral resulting in a successful outcome or was denied. Outreach documents outcomes within the Government of Canada’s Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). During this reporting period, referrals had a 62% success rate, this is an improved comparison to the rate in 2024 which was 56%. This outcome is due to increased engagement among participants which has supported more individuals exiting homelessness.

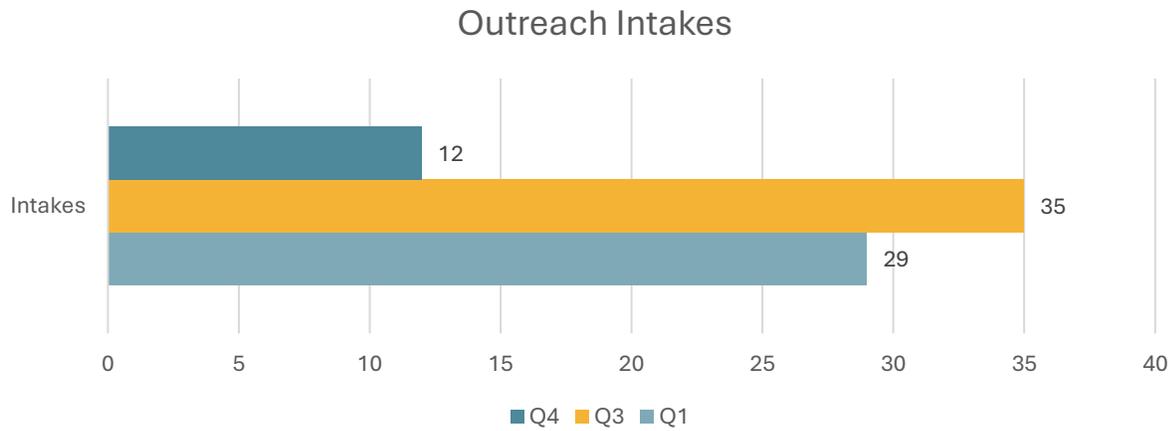
Table 4: Outreach Referral Breakdown

2025 Referrals	Q2	Q3	Q4
Housing	16	12	26
Housing Readiness	37	27	20
Addiction and Mental Health	15	22	6
Medical Supports	4	2	0
Other	13	8	5
Total	65	71	57

Intakes

Outreach completes intakes with participants who want to receive outreach services. Currently, 108 individuals have active consents for outreach services. With the implementation of HIFIS in April 2025, there is a transition away from the By-Names-List (BNL) to the Unique Identifier List (UIL). The UIL includes individuals accessing services from service providers utilizing HIFIS in Lethbridge. HIFIS has served as an effective tool for outreach services, assisting participants supported by multiple agencies and reducing duplication of efforts.

Figure 4: Outreach Intake Breakdown

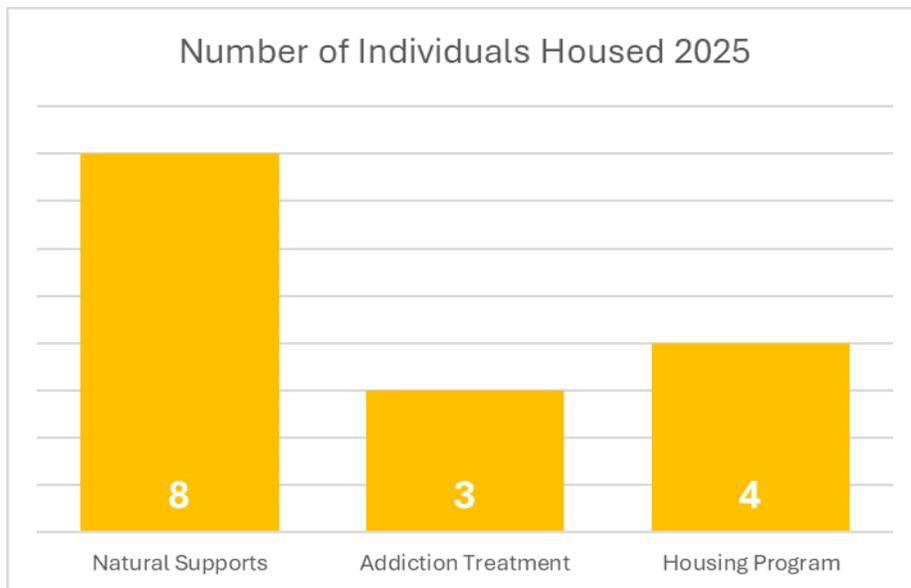


Individuals Housed

The main objective of outreach is to help individuals connect with housing and work on housing readiness. The outreach team stays engaged with individuals until they are considered stably housed. This support may involve:

- Placement in addiction treatment programs
- Housed through a housing program
- Housed through natural support networks

Figure 4: 2025 Individuals Housed Breakdown



Most individuals transitioning out of homelessness through outreach services have done so with the help of natural support. Natural support refers to individuals who are directly connected to someone, such as a family member in an external community, who welcomes the person back into their home. Additionally, housing programs have played a crucial role in helping individuals exit homelessness. Through community meetings like the Coordinated Access Round Table (CART), individuals can be referred to housing programs that best fit their needs.

Success Story

Participant stories provide qualitative context to the outcomes presented in this report. While program performance measures demonstrate outcome data, these stories illustrate how program supports translate into meaningful impacts for participants.

Two individuals residing in an encampment had been engaging irregularly with outreach services since 2023, with limited change in their circumstances. Through coordinated work with the City of Lethbridge outreach team, individualized service plans were developed to support progress toward housing readiness, with a focus on addressing substance use and financial stability.

Outreach services supported the individuals in connecting with a housing case manager, an addictions worker, and health-related supports. Through targeted referrals, the two individuals were connected to detox and treatment services. Following detox, the outreach team provided door-to-door transportation to an out-of-town treatment facility, addressing a key access barrier. Upon completion of treatment, the individuals returned to the community with transitional support from a partner agency, following outreach referral and coordination.

As a result of this coordinated, wrap-around approach, both individuals were able to secure housing. This outcome reflects the importance of sustained outreach and cross-sector collaboration and demonstrates how coordinated service delivery across multiple agencies in Lethbridge supports positive housing outcomes for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

Operational Realities

Over this reporting period, there have been several operational realities that highlight the strengths of the encampment and outreach approach, while also acknowledging challenges based on community trends.

Operational Strengths

Community Collaboration

Collaboration with community partners remains an essential component of delivering the Encampment Strategy and outreach services. Building relationships and coordinating efforts are critical to addressing the complex needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. Over this reporting period, the ERT and outreach teams have focused on strengthening these partnerships due to the increase in services being offered around the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Center and working alongside outreach groups operating under diverse mandates. These efforts aim to enhance communication, promote mutual understanding, reduce service duplication, and ensure effective service coordination.

These partnerships have proven valuable for person-centred case planning, helping overcome challenges such as locating individuals. Over this reporting period, collaboration with service providers like BTDH, the Watch, DOT, and others has led to referrals that might otherwise have been unsuccessful becoming successful. In addition, the outreach team continues to participate in monthly coordination meetings with community providers to review trends and changes within the homeless population. These meetings provide an opportunity to share successful strategies, resources, and best practices to enhance service delivery.

To strengthen collaboration with external partners, the ERT and outreach team met with two groups from the Blood Tribe: the Blood Tribe Drug Harm Reduction Project and Spirit of Hope. The visit included a meet-and-greet at City Hall, a site visit to two encampment hot spots within Lethbridge and concluded with a question-and-answer period. This collaboration aimed to deepen understanding of approaches to engaging with unhoused individuals in encampments, learn strategies to facilitate meaningful conversations and wellness check-ins, and explore opportunities for partnership development. The collaboration created opportunities for both programs to examine the similarities and differences in the challenges they face and collaborate to provide meaningful support to encampment occupants.

Business Owner Engagement

Throughout the reporting period, the ERT engaged with businesses across the community to provide education about the Encampment Strategy and available services. These visits allow businesses to share concerns and ask questions regarding social disorder around their properties. The ERT provides guidance on distinguishing between structures and loose debris and offers recommendations to deter negative behaviours, such as installing cameras and lighting, locking garbage bins, and shutting off external power sources.

The ERT also continued to provide education to other city departments, including participation in the annual Parks orientation. This initiative allows city staff to meet the team, ask questions, and gain a clear understanding of what should be reported to 311. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen interdepartmental partnerships, promote safer working conditions, and improve communication.

Collaboration with Other Alberta Communities

To learn how other Alberta communities respond to encampments, members of LPS and the ERT visited Calgary and Edmonton. Here are the key takeaways:

- **Encampment Activity:** Calgary and Edmonton experience encampments across their communities and conduct daily cleanups in hotspot areas near low-barrier shelters.
- **Team Structure:** Calgary and Edmonton ERT's operate seven days a week and are supported by dedicated police resource.
- **Calgary's Approach:** The Calgary Police Service (CPS) and City Community Peace Officers coordinate cleanups every morning near a drop-in center.
- **Edmonton's Approach:** Edmonton relies on Park Rangers under the City's Public Spaces Bylaw and the Edmonton Police Service (EPS). When encampments are reported in parkland, Park Rangers confirm the location and notify EPS. Structures are removed immediately upon first interaction, and any occupants present are offered outreach services or transportation to a navigation center. Coordinated cleanups occur every morning in downtown Edmonton near a low-barrier shelter.

While Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge differ in their response models, they share common challenges: limited access to housing, recurring re-establishment of encampments, and criminal activity within some encampments. These observations provide valuable insight into evaluating Lethbridge's current approach and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Operational Challenges

Hotspot Locations

The concentration of multiple encampment hotspots has led to a rise in tier 2 and 3 encampments. During this reporting period, the area surrounding the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre recorded the highest concentration of encampments, totalling 745, of which 210 were classified as tier 3. The second-highest hotspot location was the area of 2a Avenue North, which had 70 confirmed encampments.

Hotspot has led to the following operational challenges:

- Debris management systems are becoming overwhelmed during peak periods
- Limited response options are available to prevent re-occupation
- Staff burnout due to increased demand

Concentrated encampments are typically found in areas with low visibility, minimal foot traffic, reduced exposure to weather conditions, and less regulatory oversight, such as along road rights-of-way and boulevards. Addressing these concentrated areas requires consistent collaboration among various City departments and external partners.

2025 Strategies and Actions Taken

To address the increase in tier 2 and 3 encampments in hotspot locations, the ERT explored strategies focused on operational efficiency, disruption of re-establishment, and staff sustainability.

Strategy: Coordinated Hotspot Management

During this reporting period, CSD worked in collaboration with the LPS, Urban Revitalization, and local business owners to address the hotspot of 2a Ave North and the factors contributing to the recurring encampments. Since changes were implemented at this location, no encampments have been reported there since August. While progress has been made in this area, other hotspot locations are more challenging to address and require a proactive and consistent approach to reduce the entrenchment of encampments.

Operational Approaches

- Returning to identified hotspot areas following a coordinated encampment cleanup to re-engage individuals who were attempting to reoccupy the site.
- Deploying an additional officer to some cleanups to address multiple sites at once to improve efficiency.
- Increased frequency of coordinated cleanups in hotspot areas to reduce encampment entrenchment.
- Alternating a 2:1 cleanup schedule to reduce staff burnout and support resource availability.

Police Resources

The LPS are a key partner in oversight of the coordinated Encampment Response Strategy and the encampment operational response. During this reporting period, the majority of encampments were located in hotspot areas, leading to reduced voluntary compliance and increased hostility towards staff. The LPS played an important role in ensuring safe site navigation for the ERT and assisting with coordinated cleanups.

Increased coordinated cleanups have led to more support needed from the LPS. Since this support is provided on a call-out basis, officers' availability outside their regular shifts has contributed to burnout and limited availability. Despite these challenges, the LPS continues to ensure adequate support is provided.

Health, Safety and Environmental Concerns

Due to the increase in tier 2 and tier 3 encampments, more safety hazards have been identified during triage and coordinated cleanups.

- Fire Hazards
 - During this reporting period, the ERT proactively removed 199 expired or compromised propane canisters and tanks to minimize risk and injury. As fire risks from open flames within encampments increase, the ERT and outreach services continue to engage with encampment occupants to provide fire-safety education, reduce hazards, and support safer conditions for occupants and the general community.
- Weapons
 - Weapons are frequently identified during coordinated cleanups. During this reporting period, the ERT and LPS removed a total of 122 unique weapons from within encampments, including replica firearms, swords, and batons. Once a weapon is safely removed from an encampment, it will be disposed of to prevent further use.
- Biohazards
 - As the majority of encampments are now concentrated in areas, biohazards have become more visible and frequent. A total of 645 encampments have been identified as containing biohazardous waste, on-site or immediately adjacent to it. Members of the ERT actively encourage occupants to use nearby service-based restrooms and free public washrooms. Additional precautions are required during the cleanup of encampments containing biohazardous materials to minimize staff exposure and prevent work delays resulting from exposure incidents.

Looking Ahead

The ERT and outreach services are committed to maintaining established partnerships and strengthening new ones to keep our communities' parks and open spaces clean and safe and to support individuals experiencing homelessness. Based on data gathered from 2025 and historical patterns, these are expected trends for early 2026.

Anticipated Trends

- Hotspots will continue to be located around service providers

- An increase in fire hazards has been found in encampments
- A seasonal decline in the number of people sheltering outside during cold weather
- An increase in outreach intakes due to weather factors, and more housing options becoming available
- Continued increase in the number of coordinated cleanups and debris as a result of hotspot

Future Adjustments

In line with community trends, the ERT and outreach services will identify new strategies and resources to increase operational efficiency while ensuring safety. Current adjustments underway include:

- Improving debris removal systems to support a larger amount of debris
- Implementing operational methods from other Alberta communities that have worked in addressing hotspot areas
- The ERT will continue to trial new strategies for coordinated cleanups to improve efficiency and ensure service levels are being met
- Outreach will continue to collaborate with services operating in areas of concentrated encampments to coordinate efforts and utilize existing resources to support case planning and referrals

Future Budget Pressures

Due to underspending in the initial years of the current approval, the budget can support current operations, and the overall budget remains on track. However, the increased resourcing required to support operational demands, including dedicated support from the LPS and capacity support from the seasonal Encampment Response Worker position, will result in annual budget pressure in future years to maintain the current level of service.

CSD will continue to build upon existing strategies in collaboration with other City departments and community stakeholders to enhance coordination and respond to evolving operational demands.

Point-in-Time (PiT) Count

The 2025 Enumeration Point-in-Time (PiT) Count offers an updated snapshot of homelessness in Lethbridge and continues to guide the City's Encampment Strategy, Municipal Housing Strategy, and Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy. The 2025 count was an enumeration, unlike the full Point-in-Time Count which is survey-based and held every three years. The enumeration estimates the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night and identifies their sleeping locations. Although it does not include demographic insights, it provides valuable trend data to support evidence-based planning and community solutions.

On October 2, 2025, the city of Lethbridge conducted an enumeration that identified 504 individuals experiencing homelessness. This represented a 3% decrease from 2024 and marks the first reduction in homelessness since the PiT Count began in 2014. While the overall number remains high, this shift signals that coordinated local efforts, targeted investments, and strengthened partnerships are making an impact within the community.

To better reflect the encampment trends within the community, the 2025 Planning Committee made two changes to the count methodology. First, the definition of an encampment was revised to align with the City's

Encampment Strategy. Secondly, the ERT was assigned to zones with concentrated encampments, to leverage their established rapport and knowledge of common encampment locations.

As a result of the methodology changes, a greater proportion of individuals residing in encampments were surveyed. Although encampments appear more prominent in the 2025 data, this trend reflects improved coverage and consistency in enumeration practices rather than a significant increase in the number of individuals residing in encampments.

Figure 5: 2025 PiT Count Enumeration Total

